



FY 2025 Annual Report

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) provides technical assistance to a 30-town area in east central Vermont. Our primary goals are to advocate for the needs of our member towns and articulate a vision for building a thriving and sustainable regional economy while enhancing the region’s quality of life. TRORC staff provide services to local, state, and federal levels of government and the region’s non-profits and businesses.

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PLANNING AND ZONING

TRORC has a staff with more than 104 years of combined planning and project management experience in Vermont. We act as cost-effective professional planning staff for our municipalities under contract on developing plans, bylaws, capital budgets, and special projects. Additionally, we provide support for town planning staff, such as ad hoc questions from zoning administrators. TRORC conducts a regional review and approval of town plans on request, resulting in higher quality plans that look more closely at energy, utilities and facilities, and forest resources. Bylaw work this year was predominantly bylaw modernization to facilitate housing development in core areas. However, work also included supporting the development of ridgeline overlay standards in Barnard. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the TRORC At Work map. Highlights include:

- TRORC provided technical assistance to 5 towns related to Town Plan language.
 - Stockbridge, Brookfield, Chelsea, Hartland, and Vershire
- TRORC provided technical assistance to 15 towns related to bylaws.
 - Thetford, Strafford, Hartford, Woodstock, Bethel, Chelsea, Brookfield, Norwich, West Fairlee, Braintree, Barnard, Granville, Sharon, Corinth and Royalton.
- TRORC hosted four training events, including a training on flood resilience, a Development Review Board training, grants facilitation, and land use and transportation.

TRORC coordinates planning at the regional level through the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive regional plan and related studies. These plans guide local planning and the investment decisions of the public and private sectors.

TRORC utilized the Regional Plan to evaluate applications and participate in Act 250, Section 248 and 248a (power generation and cell towers) reviews of projects. In FY25, TRORC received 5 regular or limited 248a applications were received for larger cell towers. One, in Rochester, had major issues including location in a highest priority forest block and along scenic byway route 100. Proposals in Hartland and Tunbridge had very minor issues related to the access road.

The TRORC Board of Directors approved an updated Regional Plan on February 26, 2025. The updated housing and future land use chapters will be adopted by the Board in 2026. This has allowed TRORC the opportunity to implement required changes and state planning goals from the Act 250 reforms into our regional plan, as well as our regional housing targets.

ACT 250 AND HOUSING STATUTE REFORMS

This law created new requirements for Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) create new future land use areas. The Future Land Use map revisions broaden our core village and downtown areas, creating more room for commercial uses, as well as increasing access to state designation

financial benefits. Some of these areas currently have temporary Act 250 exemptions for housing (see the first link on the site for the exempted area). These core areas will also need to meet the state requirement that they can fit a ‘substantial majority’ of the municipal housing targets.

Using a methodology developed alongside other Vermont RPCs, TRORC worked on a publicly accessible interactive draft Regional Future Land Use Map to include areas created by the new law. The map sees the expansion of Village areas, where necessary, to plan for more housing development, and a third rural area focusing on preserving the long-term viability of agriculture and forestry. These two topics will be discussed in the 2026 Regional Plan’s Housing and Land Use chapters.

TRORC held 16 open meetings with the Planning Commission of member municipalities to review updates and receive feedback, with the remaining 14 meetings to be held in FY26. Additionally, we created new web pages, education materials, and held regional information sessions about the Regional Plan process and local involvement. To learn more, please visit www.trorc.org/regional-chapters-draft.

TRORC is also in the process of updating the Housing, Future Land Use, and Health chapters of the Regional Plan.

HOUSING

Keys to the Valley: TRORC was involved from 2018-2021 with two neighboring Regional Planning Commissions (one in NH and VT) on a comprehensive study of housing needs and solutions in this 67-town area. This initiative is currently in the implementation phase with TRORC and partners pursuing a ‘housing utility’ concept. A business case was funded last year and now funding is supporting additional organizational activities between three regional commissions and Vital Communities. TRORC continues to raise awareness about housing and supports local groups on housing needs. TRORC is a key partner of the Home Creators Expo, an annual housing exhibit involving partners in the Upper Valley and we support regional Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) initiatives. Learn more at: www.keystothevalley.com.

MAPPING

In addition to enhancing the Regional Planning Commission work, TRORC provides municipalities, state agencies, and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects. This work included:

- Custom maps by municipal request (energy, watershed/natural resource, forest blocks, road name, infrastructure atlases etc.).
- Managing the ArcGIS Online portal with several custom web maps (energy, regional plan, flooding).

- Updating town plan maps and zoning maps.
- Supporting town asset inventories (culvert, road erosion).
- Supporting parcel mapping with town outreach.
- Uploading updated town zoning layers to the Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI) portal.
- Completing Hazard Mitigation Plan analysis and maps.
- Supporting Act 174 renewable energy generation maps.
- Updating the Regional Plan Future Land Use Map (Act 181).

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

TRORC participated in the VTrans Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI), supporting local Selectboards and Road Foremen. We assisted towns in obtaining state and federal grants, managing local projects, and keeping them informed of state projects and initiatives. Our work is critical in creating local traffic counts, inventorying local systems such as culverts and sidewalks, and addressing water quality through ditching and stormwater. Our ongoing education and coordination support the interaction of the region's road crews, and ensure they are knowledgeable and supported during emergencies. This work was especially important in FY25 with local municipal staff turnover.

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

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) activity - Total of 4 meetings held, average member participation rate 40% (expressed as a % of total TAC membership)

TAC Outcomes

- TRORC participated in numerous policy stakeholder meetings as requested by VTrans and other agencies:
 - Continued as the RPC representative for the VTrans VPSP2 core team (project prioritization revamping methodology).
 - Continued as the Vermont Local Roads RPC representative in the stakeholder committee (4 meetings).
- ***Other Outreach***
 - 1 road foreman meeting
 - 1 Public Transit Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities meeting
 - Outreach to coordinate various State projects in Fairlee
- **Data collection the RPCs conduct for VTrans**
 - 60 Park and Ride (20 sites x 3x a year)

- 4 town Complete Streets form
- 32 traffic counts
- 7 bike ped count locations
- 2 sidewalk inventories (Randolph, Hartford)
- 5 culvert inventories (Royalton, Sharon, Barnard, Plymouth, Braintree)

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

- Participated in Act 250 review related to transportation issues: Sunnymede Farms in Hartland
- Operated as the Municipal Project Manager for towns awarded federal transportation grants:
 - Bridgewater - Sand Shed
 - Royalton - Chelsea Business Block Sidewalk
 - Bethel - Pleasant St Sidewalk
 - Tunbridge - Village Scoping Study
 - Sharon - Village Scoping Study
 - Fairlee - US5 Stormwater Mitigation Grant
- Coordinated with VTrans, Rochester, and Hartford on their Safe Routes to School grant awards.
- Completed participation in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Technical Oversight Working Group - Local Rural Roads Safety Manual.

Objective #3: Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities

- **Other Better Roads (BR) related work**
 - 32 grant applications; Better Roads (21), Bike Ped (2), Transportation Alternatives Program (1), District Structures/Roadways (5), Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD) Downtown Transportation Fund (2)
- **Participation in public transit efforts**
 - TRORC staff continued participation in Tri Valley Transit (TVT) Operations Committee discussions, TVT microtransit study area discussions, TVT Randolph facility, and Advance Transit Board of Directors.
- **Municipal Staff training on transportation grants**
 - With significant turnover in town Road Foreman and Administrative Assistants in last 4 years, we have met with new staff to onboard and introduce our transportation technical assistance resource and grant opportunities.
- **Continued to provide VTrans Grants in Aid Technical Assistance to towns**
 - Scoping ditching projects, filling out preconstruction paperwork, taking pre and post construction photos, assisting towns with reimbursement.
- **Assisted towns in preparing hydraulic request forms to VTrans for culvert sizing**

ENERGY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

TRORC supports state and local efforts in the transition to renewable, sustainable, and affordable energy sources, as well as integrating energy planning with land use, transportation, and natural resources efforts.

This year, TRORC continued work on the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP). All 30 towns in the TRORC region applied for MERP Project Implementation Grants, with TRORC directly applying on behalf of 26 towns. Twenty towns were awarded Implementation Grants, totaling just under \$6 million in funding. TRORC is operating as the Grant Administrator for 7 awardees, assisting them with scope development, procurement, reporting, and construction oversight.

TRORC's energy program provides training on the Residential Building Energy Standards, reviews all solar projects undergoing state review, and provides a regional determination of energy compliance for town plans that meet state criteria. In FY25, TRORC underwent a major revision of its regional plan energy chapter to meet the new State standards. TRORC received its Determination of Energy Compliance from the Public Service Department.

TRORC has a Shared Energy Coordinator (SEC) that is contracted to work with six towns on implementing their energy plans. The SEC position, supported by town appropriations and TRORC funding, has a broad mandate to work on energy-related projects that are deemed valuable by the participating towns and the SEC steering committee.

SEC accomplishments include:

- Applying for and securing a Northern Border Regional Commission Catalyst grant of \$868,000 for projects to increase the capacity of the Town of Woodstock's water system and support smart growth.
- Applying for and securing ChargeVermont grants for DC fast charging and level-2 electric vehicle charging, with total grant funding exceeding \$300,000 for five projects across four towns.
- Applying for and securing a Municipal Planning Grant of over \$18,000 to rewrite the Town of Woodstock's municipal plan, with a particular focus on redrafting the Future Land Use chapter and map to enable smart growth.

EMERGENCY PLANNING AND DISASTER RECOVERY

TRORC plays key roles in the mitigation, preparedness, and recovery phases of local emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. We provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center during times of disaster, assist in floodplain bylaws updates, and assist communities in accessing grant

funds. TRORC staff support a Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) as a venue for the region's responder and emergency managers to meet.

Flood Response

TRORC can provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center during times of disaster, but more commonly step into the Local Liaison role when tasked by Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), polling towns for disaster damage in the wake of incidents. TRORC was activated for flood response once in July 2024, and once under exercise conditions in June 2025.

The July 2024 flood was less severe than flooding from July 2023. Staff spent considerable time helping communities and residents report damage and then in accessing FEMA funding. TRORC also worked with VEM on developing mitigation applications.

Preparedness

TRORC supports our 30 municipalities in updates to their Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs). "LHMPs are broad-based plans for each town that assesses hazards and proposes measures to lessen their vulnerability to those with the most impact. TRORC assists towns with these as funding permits. These plans have a 5-year lifespan. Having a FEMA-approved LHMP qualifies the town for certain grant programs, including federal recovery funds."

TRORC has three Certified Flood Managers on staff and assists in towns with floodplain bylaw updates and permit questions. TRORC assists communities in accessing a variety of emergency related grant funds. TRORC also worked with VEM on developing mitigation applications. TRORC staff also support a Regional Emergency Management Committee that is a venue for the region's responders and emergency managers to meet and stay abreast of emergency issues.

Resilience Initiative for Vermont Empowerment and Recovery (RIVER)

TRORC coordinated with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) on recovery and project scoping after the July 2023 floods by spearheading the Resilience Initiative for Vermont Empowerment and Recovery (RIVER), a program with funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and VEM, as well as the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). The goal of the program was to identify potentially eligible flood mitigation projects for FEMA funding in nine hard-hit Vermont communities and develop applications with engineered designs.

The program collaborated with the hard-hit communities and five Regional Planning Commissions, bringing in engineering support in the vetting and development of grant application materials to seek funding from FEMA for flood reduction.

Learn more about the RIVER program at www.riverprojectsvt.org.

Education and Outreach

This year, TRORC undertook a project in partnership with Dartmouth college seniors on a capstone project in Human-Centered Design on disaster preparedness communication. This largely focused on flood and heat preparedness and culminated in a field-tested Disaster Bingo format used at senior centers. TRORC also participated as a guest lecturer with a flood resiliency class at Dartmouth.

TRORC was contracted by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC) for another statewide program to work on the Flood Community Assistance Program (FCAP) to conduct outreach and education in the same nine hard hit communities identified through the RIVER program. This program connected with community members to discuss flood prevention.

CLEAN WATER AND INFRASTRUCTURE

TRORC worked with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (US EPA) required watershed plans. TRORC holds an active role in commenting on water quality initiatives by the state and promoting high quality waters through basin planning processes. We have remained active in ANR's tactical basin planning processes and supported the implementation of water quality initiatives.

TRORC is continued participation in a green stormwater infrastructure project with funding from Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC) to identify potential sites for municipal green stormwater infrastructure to reduce pollutant runoff in the region.

TRORC worked with towns to identify infrastructure and properties vulnerable to flooding and/or fluvial erosion and supports local Flood Bylaw administration with our Certified Flood Manager (CFM) staff.

TRORC supported FEMA remapping in the White River, Ompompanoosuc, Waits, Wells, and Ottauquechee River Watersheds.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth is best supported when development efforts are integrated with solid local planning. TRORC collaborates with towns and local and regional development groups to this end in numerous ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help position Vermont for long term economic gain.

TRORC worked toward these efforts in several ways:

- TRORC finished its last year with the Vermont Creative Network 'Field Agent' position. The Vermont Creative Network is scaling down and reducing funding, but TRORC will continue

to support the East Central Vermont Creative Zone (previously Cornerstone Creative Community of Vermont, 3CVT). TRORC supported creative individuals and businesses in the East Central Vermont Economic Development District (ECVEDD).

- TRORC participated in Vermont Arts Council Steering Team meetings and monitors a community discussion email list and Facebook page for creatives.
- TRORC continued to collaborate with the ECVEDD on implementation of the goals, strategies, and actions of the district's recently updated (June 2025) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).
- TRORC staff assisted the town of Hartford, VT, on a Downtown Vibrancy program. Staff surveyed and interviewed over 200 people to get their opinion on the successes of Downtown White River Junction (a village within the town of Hartford, VT). This Vibrancy survey was used to make recommendations to the White River Junction Economic Steering Team and Downtown board.
- TRORC staff provided grant management and other forms of technical assistance for economic development projects in Hartford, Rochester, Randolph, Newbury, Strafford, Hancock, Royalton, and Woodstock.

BROWNFIELDS

TRORC has sought and been awarded \$2,000,000 over the last twenty years for this economic development initiative. Environmental site assessments allow properties to be sold, developed, or re-developed in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs, and increase housing opportunities. The assessments remove concerns about contamination and allow properties to be sold and redeveloped in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs, provide greenspace, and increase housing opportunities.

In FY 2025, TRORC used a combination of US Environmental protections Agency (EPA) and Vermont State brownfields funding to carry forward assessment work on sites in Fairlee, Topsham, Rochester, Strafford, Chelsea, and Hartford.

ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING

TRORC is funded by performance and project contracts with federal, state, and local levels of government, foundation support, and contributions from member municipalities and non-profits. TRORC's FY 2025 budget was approximately \$3.7 million. Base state planning funding from the Property Transfer Tax passed through to us by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development leverages over three times as much additional funding (primarily from federal sources) that we use to address the needs of citizens, businesses, and communities in the TRORC region. TRORC's non-profit arm, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Foundation (TRORF), complements and furthers the work of TRORC by being able to access philanthropic funding.

TRORC always has a Single Audit conducted by an independent Certified Public Accounting firm and has numerous field audits and reviews by funders. No significant findings, material weaknesses, nor questioned costs were identified this year. Staff continuously avail themselves of professional development opportunities in program and administrative areas.

TRORC serves 30 municipalities and operates with a Board of Directors, comprised of representatives from each municipality, who develop and implement policy and oversee a staff of 14. The Board systematically updates all accounting practices and safeguards and organizational policies on an ongoing basis.

‘AT WORK’ MAP

TRORC 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/>

TRORC At Work-FY2025

