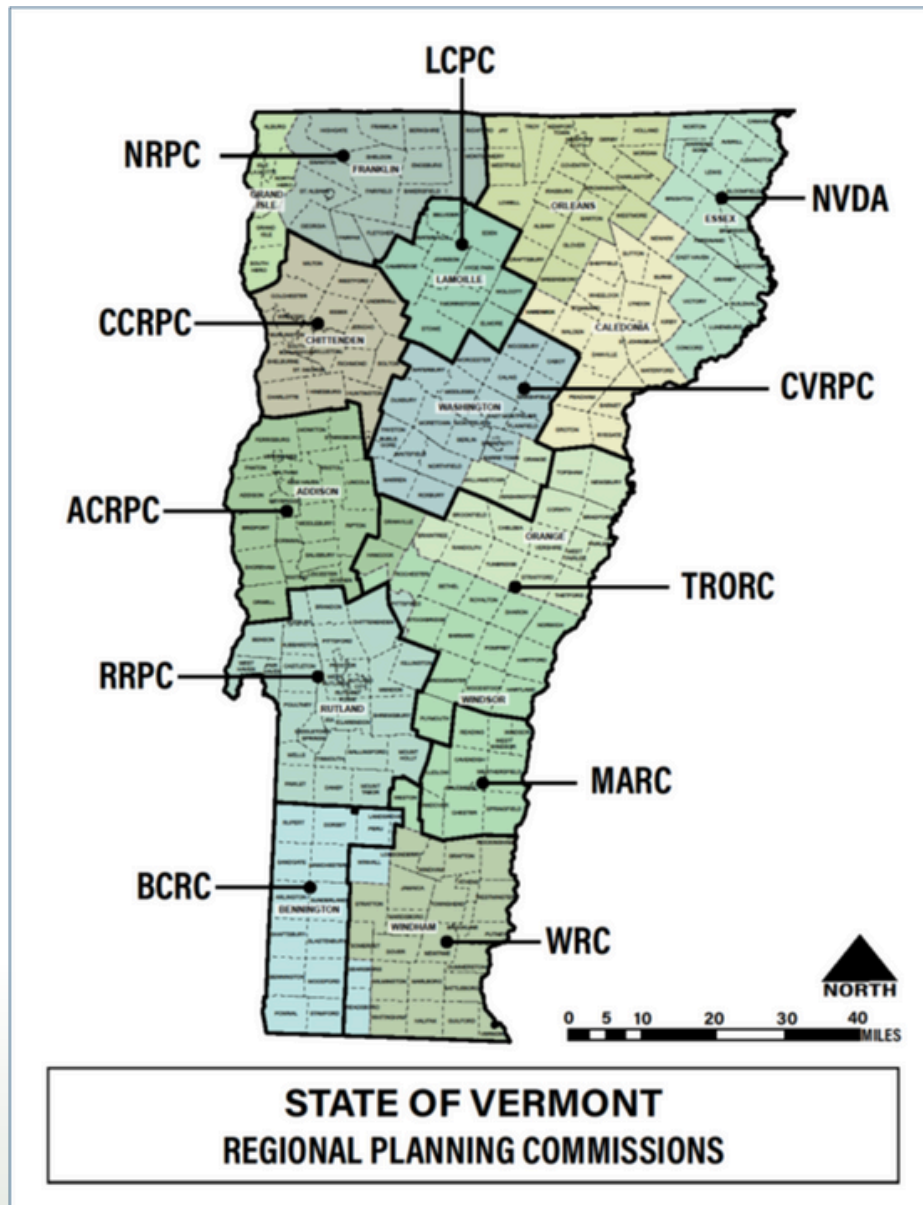


## Fiscal Year 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



September 30, 2024

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This annual report and each individual RPC's annual reports are all available on an interactive website. Scan the QR code or visit:



<https://vapda-report-vapda.hub.arcgis.com>

# **ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

## **FY 2024 Annual Report**

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) serves 21 municipalities within Addison County. ACRPC assists towns in the Addison Region (the “Region”) to help provide effective local government and works cooperatively with them to address statewide, regional and local issues.

Municipalities choose to be members of ACRPC. Each municipality’s legislative body appoints 1, 2 or 3 Commissioners, depending upon the population of the municipality, to represent the municipality’s interest on ACRPC’s Board. Additionally, ACRPC’s Board accommodates up to six citizen-interest commissioners who represent other regional interests such as business and industry, natural resources, agriculture and social services. ACRPC delegates a significant portion of its work to six (6) sub-committees, which review various aspects of the Commission’s business. Commissioners serve on these committees and make recommendations for action to the full Commission. All of ACRPC’s committees are advisory. Only the Executive Board and Full Commission have the authority to make decisions to bind ACRPC. Eight highly qualified staff with more than 100 years of combined professional experience provide support to the Commission and its committees and execute the Commission’s work program.

### **PLANNING & ZONING**

RPCs act as cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont’s municipalities. Of the 21 towns served by ACRPC, only Middlebury employs a full-time planner. All other communities rely on volunteer planning commissions aided and supplemented by ACRPC’s staff or outside consultants. ACRPC’s work in recent years has focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and enhanced consultations (on-site training), modernizing bylaws and implementing mapping and policy within local plans. Current and clear plans and bylaws are essential to ensure a smooth state and local permitting process. This work is supported through a combination of Federal, State and Local funding sources. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the “At Work” map; highlights include:

- Continued working with the towns of Waltham and Ferrisburgh on their 2023 MPGs. Waltham has finished its Plan update and is in the process of getting local approval. We continue to work with Ferrisburgh on the Travel and Trails Master Plan.
- Orwell has completed its Town Plan update, including a new section focusing on its Village Center, and is going through local approval.
- ACRPC assisted Addison in applying for a 2024 MPG to update its Town Plan and continue to work with Addison on a community survey and plan revisions.
- We are working with Salisbury on their 2024 Bylaw Modernization grant.
- Currently we are helping Lincoln, Bridport, Shoreham and New Haven to collect data and generate maps for their Town plan updates.
- ACRPC provided technical support to all Zoning Administrators within the Region.

- ACRPC held several trainings for local Planning Commissions. Topics included “Roles and Responsibilities”, “Creating Accessory Dwelling Units” and “Solar siting on Municipal Property”.
- ACRPC conducted municipal consultations in the Towns of Bridport, Cornwall, Lincoln, Middlebury, New Haven, Orwell, Shoreham and Starksboro.
- ACRPC provided technical support to Starksboro and Whiting for Village Center Designation.
- In Middlebury, New Haven and Vergennes, ACRPC continued to serve as the Municipal Project Manager on several community infrastructure projects creating sidewalks, shared use paths or bike routes. In Middlebury, the sidewalk/path ties neighborhoods and industrial areas to downtown Middlebury. In Vergennes the sidewalk ties the Otter Creek Basin with downtown Vergennes and the Tri-town Bike Loop provides biking connections between our communities.

RPCs coordinate 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.

- ACRPC finished the Population and Housing section update for the regional plan in 2022. The housing committee followed that up with a survey demonstrating the strong desire for housing in the region. ACRPC also operated a housing navigator service to encourage building accessory dwelling units within the Region. ACRPC created a Guide to Creating Accessory Dwelling Units for the Region: [here](#) in the previous year. The guide provides a comprehensive guide for homeowners to use to create an accessory dwelling unit, including lots of practical connections to permitting authorities, forms and a financial calculator. This year ACRPC used its guide to support its housing navigator program. ACRPC worked with 12 Addison County residents to evaluate and plan for ADUs. Three have been constructed to date.
- ACRPC continued working on the Economic Development section of the Plan. It intends to feed the Regional Economic Development data developed in the CEDS process (See Economic Development below) into the Addison County Regional Plan and the Plan for the Economic Development Corporation.
- Began working to update the Natural Resource and Childcare sections of the Regional Plan
- Worked on re-writing the Transportation section of the Plan
- Worked with other regional planning commission and partners on statewide housing legislation which will lead to new Future Land Use sections of the plan.
- Oversaw a regional health equity grant that supported the following projects:
  - Cornwall - outdoor recreation area project. Supported the town through grant research, applications, RFP development, permitting, engineer contracting, etc. Awarded VOREC grant and the project will enter construction in 2024.
  - Vergennes - Worked with Middlebury students to continue our regional work to capture sidewalk inventories for all relevant towns.
  - Supported the development of and outreach for the Addison Co. Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). For the CHNA, ACRPC utilized stipend funds to better

engage priority populations in the region. We partnered with the Open Door Clinic, Addison Allies, Charter House, and CVOEOs Food access programs to meet low income, high risk community members where they are. We were successful in gathering 60 surveys from these individuals for the CHNA.

## **ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION**

A renewed focus on clean, renewable, sustainable and affordable energy presents Vermont with great opportunity and significant challenges. RPCs integrate energy planning with land use, transportation and natural resources efforts, and 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.

- ACRPC energy committee - hosted 10 energy committee meetings to provide updates on ongoing energy programs and opportunities. Included presentations on the Municipal Energy Resilience Program, Green Mountain Power sustainability, EV infrastructure planning
- Provided technical assistance to all towns in pursuing the MERP mini grant and energy assessments.
- Supported the Vergennes energy fair in 2023 and planned the regional energy fair in 2024. Recruited volunteers and energy organization representatives to communicate energy efficiency opportunities and raise awareness of available resources including ACRPC.
- Supported the development of the Climate Economy Action Center of Addison County Energy Navigator program designed to support residents in accessing energy retrofits for their homes
- Provided technical assistance in understanding EV infrastructure requirements and available resources and programs to support community purchase of chargers.
- Collaborated with CVOEO's Green Saving Smart coach to communicate opportunities for low-income individuals in relevant community spaces including the Addison County Hunger Council and member organizations, energy committees, church groups.
- Provided staff support for the Walk Bike Council of Addison County. Organized the meetings, generated minutes, and contributed programmatic expertise on new and ongoing Bike/ped funding opportunities.
- Worked with the Public Service Department to update the Regional enhanced energy planning materials and generated necessary materials and data for the regional and municipal enhanced energy planning process.

## **BROWNFIELDS**

Vermont RPCs have sought and been awarded over 10 million dollars for this economic development initiative. RPCs have performed environmental site assessments on brownfield locations throughout the state. Environmental site assessments allow properties, and formerly degraded properties, to be sold, remediated (if needed), developed or re-developed in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs and increase housing opportunities.

- In 2022, ACRPC secured a \$500,000 Community Wide Assessment (CWA) grant from the EPA- the implementation will continue through 2026

- ACRPC has been working with a subcontractor to implement the CWA brownfields grant through work on the following:
  - o Addison: Central School and Town Hall
  - o Middlebury: Satori Facility, Ilsley Library, Town-owned Maverick Station property, potential Flood-risk property buyouts
- Compliment ACRPC's Transit Oriented Development Program by Identifying potential brownfield areas for Area Wide Planning activities along the Vermont Rail corridor in Ferrisburgh-Vergennes-Middlebury

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with towns and in strong partnership with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) to this end in a number of ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont to achieve long term economic gain.

- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy - ACRPC worked jointly with the Addison County Economic Development Corporation to create an EDA Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. ACRPC/ACEDC and partners completed and the EPA approved a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy "CEDS" for the Region in the prior year. This year it focused on creating an application to form an Economic Development District.
- ACRPC also worked with ACEDC to create a list of important planning and economic development projects within the region and supported several grant applications for local businesses.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

Through contracts with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), RPCs coordinate the federally funded Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort provides a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the improvements to Vermont's transportation system, with local communities represented through regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TAC). 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. RPCs help fulfill five transportation planning objectives. The Objectives and ACRPC's work under each are listed below.

- Led 16 coordination activities between VTrans and interested Addison County parties, including:
  - o ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee
  - o Addison County Committee on the Older Adults and People with Disabilities
  - o Tri Valley Transit Board of Directors (Chair), Finance Committee, Nominating Committee and Addison Regional Operating Committee (Chair)
  - o Walk Bike Council of Addison County
  - o Road Foremen meetings

- Local Concerns meetings on various topics
- Initiated culvert inventories in seven communities
- Assisted thirteen towns in preparing grant applications to VTrans
- Coordinated installation of way-finding signs along the Triangle Bike Loop in seven towns
- Oversaw four municipal planning studies (4 TAC grants)
- Conducted 37 data collection activities on behalf of towns and VTrans (Speed counts, bike, ped, park and ride counts, etc.)
- Assisted with a Planning and Environment Linkages Study traffic in downtown Vergennes.
- Assisted in creation of an Asset Management Plan for Vergennes

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont's Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, VTrans, and the Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the Local Emergency Planning Committees, and coordination among responders and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPC's also assist with updating floodplain bylaws, creating FEMA-qualified hazard mitigation plans, coordinating updates to municipal emergency plans and providing as needed assistance in special circumstances and declared disasters.

- All 21 municipal Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs) completed and submitted
- Recruited and trained 1 new local Emergency Management Director
- RPC staff trained and certified to work as post-event Local Liaisons to municipalities and for roles at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC)
- Wrote and managed annual EMPG grant (\$53,100)
- Implemented two Flood Resilient Communities Fund grants (\$106,000), and one Building Resilient Infrastructures and Communities grant (\$30,000).
- Applied for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding.
- Worked on Local Hazard Mitigation Plans for the towns of Leicester, Monkton, and Salisbury; Panton's LHMP was submitted and accepted by FEMA.
- Organized quarterly meetings of the Addison County Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC).
- Assisted towns, state, and FEMA following July 2023 flood event.

## **MAPPING**

RPCs provide municipalities, state agencies and regional groups with mapping and data analysis services in support of their projects.

- ACRPC's mapping program supports nearly every planning function it performs. Every municipal plan, enhanced energy plan or zoning bylaw created contains maps produced by ACRPC.
- ACRPC updated town and regional data layers to ensure the best available regional data is available through the Vermont Center for Geographic Information.

- ACRPC created new and updated existing maps for town plan updates in the town of Ripton, and provided technical support for Monkton, Starksboro, and Cornwall on village center designation applications.
- ACRPC continued to support the data gathering efforts its transportation program is undertaking to map hydrologically connected roadways within the Region.
- ACRPC continued to support emergency management and planning in the Region by producing updated flood hazard maps and by mapping citizen reports of areas damaged by flooding in July.
- ACRPC continued to support regional conservation efforts by providing ecological mapping & analysis for many communities including Monkton, Waltham, New Haven, Ferrisburgh, Cornwall, Middlebury, and Ripton.
- ACRPC created interactive online GIS maps and dashboards for the Addison County Riverwatch Collaborative, Vermont Coverts, Middlebury College, the Addison County Economic Development Corporation, and the Western Central Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Program.
- ACRPC used spatial analysis and created map products to support Maple Broadband's high-level design and planning efforts (see Special Projects).
- ACRPC used spatial analysis to create a map of statewide opportunities for thermal network connectivity.
- ACRPC developed or updated regional databases of municipal facilities, transportation networks, and natural resources (e.g, zoning, state designations, trails, culverts, etc).

## **CLEAN WATER**

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the required watershed basin plans. RPCs also work with municipalities to implement river corridor assessments in local planning efforts and regulations, which result in water quality improvements, riverine habitat and safer growth management decisions.

- Served as the Clean Water Service Provider for the Otter Creek Basin.
- Coordinated a Basin Water Quality Council to oversee the Clean Water Service Provider
- Provided funding through the Clean Water Service Provider to 17 projects to improve water quality, 5 of which are implementation projects.
- Oversaw Grants in Aid roadway improvement projects in 7 towns
- ACRPC continued its support of and participation as part of the Addison County River Watch Collaborative (ACRWC). ACRPC hosts the ACRWC meetings and sampling events, maintains the website with current sampling data for the public, and supports presentations to targeted community boards and "kitchen water chats." ACRPC helped develop public outreach documents for the ACRWC including summary sheets of Middlebury River, New Haven River, and Lewis Creek, as well as information regarding recent contaminant levels at 8 observed recreational sites.
- ACRPC worked with ANR 's Basin Planner to help add projects to the Otter Creek Tactical Basin Plan.
- ACRPC wrote and received a CWIP grant for all RPCs



## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

RPCs Work on a number of unique projects each year. Examples at ACRPC include:

- ACRPC continued to support the work of the Addison County Communications Union District, dba Maple Broadband, which it helped to create in 2020. Maple Broadband's goal is to bring broadband services to underserved populations throughout the county. ACRPC continued to help Maple Broadband in the current year with GIS work for site identification, support systems development, marketing, and serving as Clerk and advisor to Maple Broadband's Full Board and Executive Board.
- ACRPC continued its work with VTrans and the City of Vergennes to study and find solutions for the issues created by heavy truck traffic within the City Center. The Planning and Environmental Linkages Study ("PELS") now underway is taking a hard look at the land use planning impacts of any proposed solutions to ensure that the transportation design component of the project increases the overall economic vitality of all areas studied and to serve as a precursor to the federal NEPA process for any solutions chosen.
- ACRPC continued its work with Middlebury College to develop a master plan for the College's Champlain Valley land holdings. ACRPC staff has been working to conduct public outreach and data analysis that will inform future planning on those lands and allow for more transparent and informed land management decisions.
- ACRPC began work in collaboration with the Green Mountain National Forest to create a master plan for the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area. The master plan will evaluate current conditions in the national recreation area and lay out possibilities for the future.
- ACRPC has been working with Conservation Commissions throughout the Region to create a collaborative working group that will allow for knowledge sharing and cross-boundary planning. ACRPC has created a website and listserv and has also hosted several meetings on development and vision for the group.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

ACRPC receives most of its funding through grants and performance-based contracts with the state. Town assessments constitute a small but very important percentage of our funding. For fiscal year 2024, ACRPC's total revenue of approximately \$1,000,000 dollars was derived from 95 percent state and federal grants supporting regional and local projects, and 5 percent from town assessments. While percentages may vary slightly from year to year, the year was typical of ACRPC revenue.

ACRPC operates an electronic accounting and time tracking system based upon QuickBooks software;

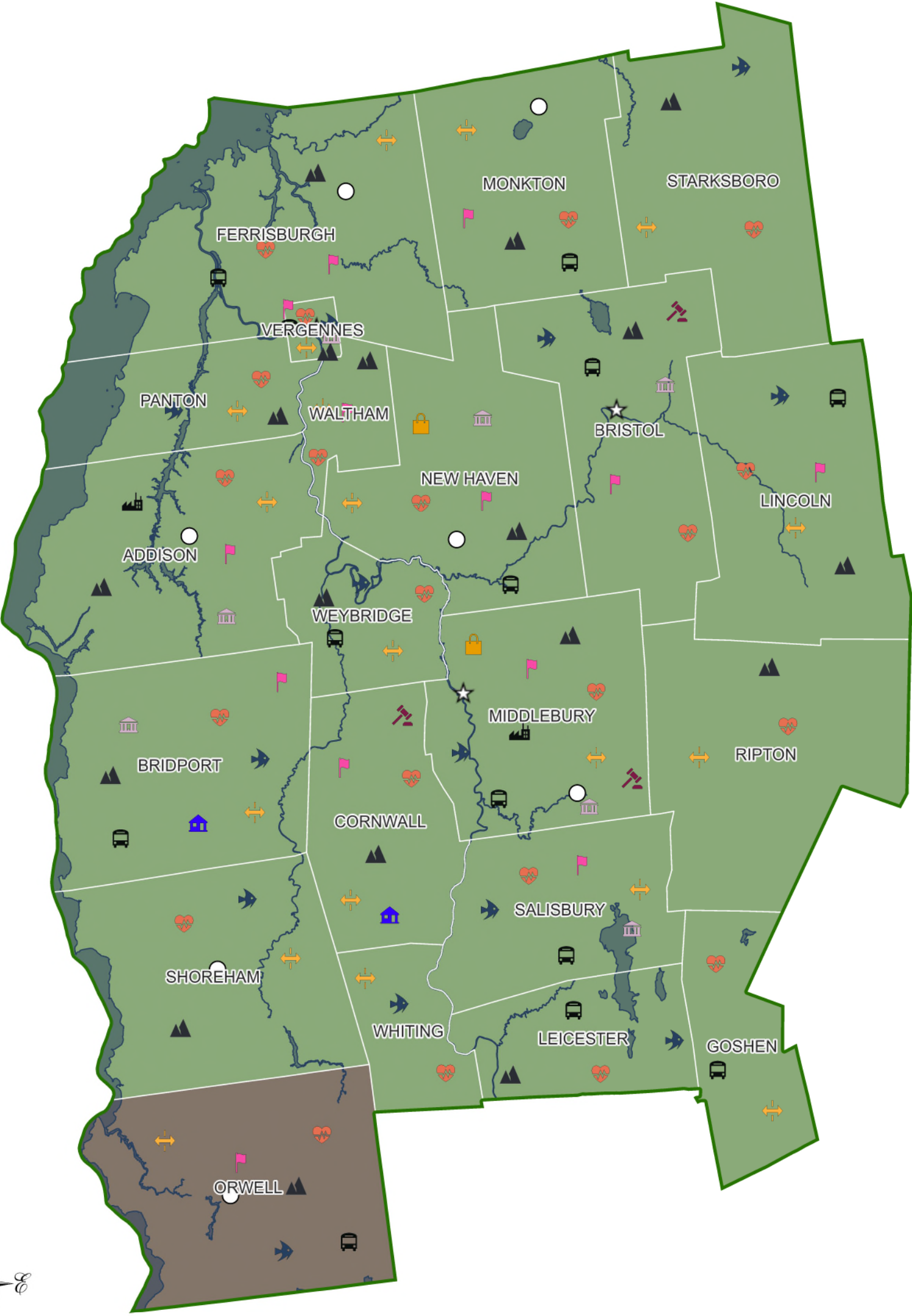
- All of its critical documents are stored and backed up on the cloud;
- ACRPC's updated financial policies reflect the electronic systems;
- ACRPC also upgraded its website and a significant number of its IT systems and software to help modernize its operations and improve its efficiency.
- ACRPC implemented a bill payment system to provide tighter controls of vendor payments including the ability to have invoices locked once entered, multiple reviewers, and an audit trail

ACRPC has an audit on an annual basis. For FY 2023, its most recent audit, there were no significant findings, which is the same result found in audits conducted in past years. ACRPC's audit for FY 2024 will be completed by December 2024.

### **'AT WORK' MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the ACRPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Addison County Regional Planning Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

**Designation**

- ☆ Designated Downtown
- Designated Village
- Designated Growth Center
- △ Neighborhood Development Area



New Town Center

**Projects**

- Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation
- Clean Water



Emergency Planning & Response



Planning and Zoning Assistance



Mapping



Economic Development



Grant Writing



Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities



Housing



Brownfields

**Municipal Plan Status**

- Current
- Expired
- No Town Plan

# **BENNINGTON COUNTY REGIONAL COMMISSION**

## **FY 2024 Annual Report**

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) was created by the seventeen towns and villages it serves and 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 an 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 comprised 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 \$1.633 million in FY 2023. The majority of revenues 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 FY24 financial audit will be completed in October 2024 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.

## 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 FY24 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. In September 2022 the Vermont Community Broadband Board approved the CUD's \$9.01 million application under Act 71 to fund a two-year buildout of a fiber optic network to unserved and underserved premises throughout Bennington County. This funding supported a public-private partnership between the SoVT CUD and Consolidated Communications that leveraged another \$14.1 million in fiber optic network construction from Consolidated. This culminated in a celebratory [event with Senator Peter Welch](#) in Q1 at Bromley Mountain in Peru. BCRC staff's work in Q2 was focused on closeout documentation for the Act 71 Construction Grant that enabled this extensive and rapid fiber buildout. In Q3, the CUD received the first ninety percent of the \$9 million grant and transferred the award to its CCI partners. As a result, the CUD now owns nearly \$8 million of fiber optic cable across southwestern Vermont. The network buildout was completed in September 2023 and now provides fiber optic broadband to 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.
- **Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone:** The BCRC worked closely with colleagues at the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) to drive interest and participation in the project submission process of the 2019 Southern Vermont CEDS, which the BCRC and BDCC are in the process of renewing in FY25. BCRC staff hosted virtual meetings to describe the purpose and value of a CEDS project submission, secured the support of review committee members, developed a new project form to simplify the process on the front end and the back end, and included an "opt-in" series of questions to screen for Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Regional Project Priority details. For the first time, the number of projects submitted exceeded 100, a twenty percent increase over the previous year.
  - BCRC staff have also worked closely with BDCC colleagues on the successful procurement of a \$70,500 award from the United States Economic Development

Administration (US EDA) to secure consulting services in the creation of a new 2024 CEDS to succeed the existing (and expiring) 2019 CEDS. The cohort assembled the requisite steering committee from members of the public around the region, produced an RFP, and reviewed the submissions from approximately one dozen respondents to the RFP. The selected firm unexpectedly terminated their contract without cause at the end of Q4, and staff worked diligently to prepare a rebid for services in line with federal regulations. A new consultant was secured for the work that will carry into FY25.

- The legal work to provide for the creation of an entity to serve as the designee for a formal Southern Vermont Economic Development District (EDD) has been completed with support from the BCRC, BDCC, and the Windham Regional Commission. Development of the legal entity is the first step in the effort to create an EDD serving the two southernmost counties in Vermont. The formal application to become an EDD has now been submitted to the US EDA.
- The 7th annual Southern Vermont Economy Summit took place in Wilmington on May 21, 2024. The theme of the 2024 Summit was “Meeting the Challenges of Tomorrow.” The Summit was another major success, bringing together over 300 people dedicated to improving the economic conditions and lives of those living in Southern Vermont. The Southern Vermont Economy Summit is co-produced by the BCRC and the BDCC.
- The BCRC remains an active member of the Vermont Creative Network’s Southern Vermont Zone. The Zone, one of five in the network, covers Bennington and Windham counties. Staff are focused on bringing economic development perspectives to the team’s activities, and facilitating data-informed conversations within the creative community and the broader business community it operates in.
- **Business Visitations and Support:** BCRC staff conducted 80 business visits in FY24. Businesses included large manufacturers and healthcare providers, nonprofit museums, value-added agricultural producers, downtown retail, food service, real estate offices, and new business startups. Topics included workforce challenges, Vermont Capital Investment Grants, Building Communities Grants, Community Recovery & Revitalization Program (CRRP), real estate development and rehabilitation, community support, housing challenges, land management network building, business acquisitions, Municipal Technical Assistance Program, Northern Border Regional Commission Catalyst grants, and business relocation incentives.
- **Vermont Training Program.** The BCRC worked with John Young and the Vermont Training Program (VTP) to facilitate three successful VTP awards in FY24: Kaman Composites in Bennington (\$41,885); Mack Molding in Arlington (\$90,631.85); and Al Clayton Construction in Bennington (\$11,391.96).
- **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 two applicants in FY24: a woman/veteran-owned nonprofit providing service dog training at no cost to first responders, and a woman-owned business expanding from



tailoring and alterations into an underserved embroidery market. BCRC staff takes pride in providing high-quality projects to the review committees and is optimistic about success in this year's cohort of applicants. Both companies BCRC assisted were awarded funding.

- **Vermont Business Magazine.** BCRC staff coordinated with Vermont Business Magazine (VBM) to provide a downtown walking tour with business interviews for inclusion in a VBM piece on the successful resurgence of Downtown Bennington and its major catalyst, the Putnam Block. The article, "Making it on Main Street Bennington takes optimism and a village" is in VBM's January print edition, and was first distributed online in November: <https://vermontbiz.com/news/2023/november/22/making-it-main-street-bennington-takes-optimism-and-village>
- **Community Recovery & Revitalization Program:** CRRP grants are available to for-profit, nonprofit, and municipal applicants. The funding is intended for projects making capital improvements or capital expansions that spur economic recovery and revitalization in communities across the state. Eligible projects may include those that assist industries most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic such as arts and entertainment, hospitality, agriculture, and educational services. The funding is also available for capital expenditures that support childcare and affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households, and to establish or improve municipal water and wastewater systems to build housing or create jobs through business creation and expansion. Projects must show a COVID impact. BCRC continued to work with applicants on this program in FY24. While there were no awards made to Bennington County in the third round, in the final round four BCRC-supported projects received awards - Arlington Common (\$400,000), The Barnstead Inn (\$98,400), Putnam Block LLC (\$400,000), and The Tutorial Center (\$56,000). Over the course of the program BCRC assisted with eight successful applications totaling \$3,095,120 and supporting overall project investment of \$21,688,791.
- **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. Discussions with additional retail, food and office tenants are ongoing. Planning for Phase 2 of the redevelopment is well underway. 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 March 2024 that Senator Peter Welch had secured a \$5,000,000 Congressionally Directed Spending appropriation to benefit the project. Meanwhile, dialogue with Evernorth and Shires 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.
- **Workforce Development:** The BCRC Workforce and Education Committee continued its monthly meetings in a virtual format throughout the fiscal year. Areas of discussion included shoring up childcare in the region, 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 and the event was a big success in September 2023 with over 120 job seekers and 53 employers participating. Over twenty career month events took place throughout the county in April and into early May 2024. The BCRC also launched 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.

## **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.

Throughout FY24, BCRC staff worked to draft an updated plan meeting new statutory requirements. At the same time the BCRC began outlining strategy for moving to a web-based plan format. The draft plan was reviewed by an ad hoc Plan Review Committee and a public hearing for the proposed new plan is scheduled for October to garner more feedback before a second hearing and potential adoption in November 2024. Transfer to a web-based format is expected to occur by the end of 2026 after a comprehensive public engagement effort to inform additional new policy and compliance with Act 181.

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. A formal application for the 20MW "Shaftsbury Solar" project was filed with the Public Utility Commission (PUC) on May 17, 2023. The BCRC Energy Committee previewed the proposal on January 13, 2023, and then met in July 2023 to help BCRC staff develop comments on the proposed project with respect to regional plan policies. The BCRC's official comments were submitted to the Public Utility Commission in October 2023. BCRC staff attended the evidentiary hearing by the PUC on July 15, 2024. 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 in 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 23, 2024, 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 FY 24 the BCRC reviewed and approved an amendment to the Sunderland Town Plan and the adoption of a new town plan in Woodford, both in December 2023.
- **Municipal Consultations:** In FY24 the BCRC met with the planning commissions of Rupert, Sandgate, and Shaftsbury to assess plan implementation and training needs. Consultation reports for each were provided to document the assessments.
- **Designation Program:** The BCRC assisted Sunderland to apply for and secure a village center designation that includes the Ira Allen Cemetery, the Sunderland Union Church on Hill Farm Rd., and the River House and Ira Allen House inns on Route 7A. These facilities represent critically important facets of the town's history.
- **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 is working to remove a road sand and salt pile from a wetland and flood hazard area to a new upland site. The town also hopes to build a shed to cover the pile. The town has engaged an engineering firm to draw up a site plan for the new shed site. 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 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 aim is for ownership of the church to transfer to the Northshire Community Land Trust, which will then undertake its rehabilitation for use as a three-season community gathering space. In addition to securing the MTAP funding, BCRC staff is coordinating the work efforts on each of these projects.
- **Consortium Bylaw Modernization Grant Closeout:** In the spring of 2022, the BCRC began a work program with nine municipalities to implement bylaw improvements for housing that were identified in a regional housing bylaw survey completed in 2021. This consortium effort was conducted with funding from a Bylaw Modernization Grant (BMG) through the Department of Housing & Community Development. Municipalities included under the grant were Landgrove, Manchester Village, North Bennington, Old Bennington, Peru, Rupert, Sandgate, Shaftsbury, and Stamford. Of these, Landgrove, Manchester Village, Peru, Rupert, Sandgate and Shaftsbury adopted revisions that met program priorities before the January 2024 grant deadline and received local match waivers. North

Bennington and Old Bennington are still working on revisions in keeping with the program goals and Stamford declined to make revisions under the grant program. The BCRC completed grant closeout work subsequent to the January 2024 deadline.

- **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.
- **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. This work is in progress and will be finalized by September 2025.
- **Pownal Development Site Study:** With funding from a FY22 Municipal Planning Grant, in October 2023, BCRC completed a study to assist the Town of Pownal in identifying 15 preferred economic development sites for mixed-use, residential, commercial, and industrial development scenarios. Every lot in Pownal was analyzed and scored based on criteria including lot size, water/sewer infrastructure, soil type, presence of rare species and wetlands, environmental hazards, transportation infrastructure, designations with development incentives, and the degree of public investment that would be needed for predevelopment on behalf of the town. Forty-one prime lots were identified and grouped into five key sites based on each development scenario. The report provided a map of the lots included at each site, a brief site description, and a chart outlining relevant details used in the selection process. Recommendations included changes to setback and parking requirements to encourage development in key areas, and the creation of a new Village Center Zoning District.
- **Pownal Center Village/Center Street Park Improvement Study:** With funding from a \$20,500 FY 23 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 will identify and prioritize physical improvements to enhance the village center, to foster a sense of community and facilitate development in the area. This project is expected to be completed in December 2024.
- **South Shaftsbury Commercial Sites Assessments:** Shaftsbury has 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 is underway and expected to be completed by November 2024.
- **Manchester Mobile Home Park:** One significant initiative came at the conclusion of Q1, as BCRC staff worked with Manchester town officials and a mobile home park owner towards a wastewater assessment for the Manchester Mobile Home Park. The Vermont Healthy Homes Initiative Manufactured Housing Communities Program (HHI-MHP)

assessment is an ARPA-funded design, and construction grant program for water and wastewater systems serving mobile home parks. The grant application was submitted in Q2 and was successful in securing \$26,500 for site engineering, with additional funding available subject to the conclusions of that study.

## 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:** The BCRC oversaw the development and managed operations of a permanent household hazardous waste collection facility at the Bennington Transfer Station, funded by the member towns of the alliance and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. The facility became operational on July 31, 2023, and 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.

## 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. In FY23 BCRC staff and the TAC participated in and provided critical input on the cancelation of the Bennington Bypass South Project.
- Provided direct outreach to each member town and village regarding codes and 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 Bennington, Arlington, Manchester, Manchester Village, Pownal, Rupert, and Dorset.
- 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 participated 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.

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

- The BCRC wrote a winning \$2.4 million grant proposal for additional design and construction funds for the Ninja Path in Bennington through the VTrans Bicycle-Pedestrian Grant Program. Approximately half of the project funding is from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Carbon Reduction Program (CRP), which funds projects designed to reduce transportation emissions by focusing investments on bicycle,

pedestrian, transit, micromobility and fleet electrification projects, in alignment with the VT Carbon Reduction Strategy.

- 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.

### **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 planning and 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.
- Dorset: BCRC staff managed a scoping study (now complete) to evaluate alternatives for a new shared-use path to connect Dorset’s village center to the recently completed Manchester Rail Trail. Combined, the two paths would create a continuous 6.5 mile shared-use path linking Dorset’s village center to downtown Manchester along the VT Route 30 Corridor.
- 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.
- BCRC secured Better Road Grants for the towns of Arlington, Rupert, Sandgate and Shaftsbury.
- BCRC staff organized a Trolley Path Steering Committee to bring a project to create a multi-use path along a historic trolley line from Bennington to Williamstown, MA To fruition.
- The BCRC completed traffic studies to aid local planning in Arlington, Bennington, 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 Manchester Village, Sandgate and Shaftsbury.

## BROWNFIELDS

Vermont RPCs have been awarded over 10 million dollars for this economic development initiative. 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 advises owners of several 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.

BCRC's most recent US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Assessment Grant ended in 2022. Two subsequent EPA grant applications have not been successful. The BCRC intends to apply for a \$500,000 FY25 EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant this fall. Meanwhile, BCRC has maintained an active Brownfields Redevelopment Program by using over \$300,000 in environmental assessment grants through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) Brownfields Program. 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).
- **Lauson Machine and Engineering (The Bradford Mill), Bennington:** Completed Phase I ESA and Phase 2 ESA. The draft CAP is currently being reviewed by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Redevelopment plans include market value and workforce housing with potential commercial and retail services.
- **The former Bennington High School in Downtown Bennington:** A Phase 2 ESA and CAP were recently approved by the Vermont DEC. An updated Phase 1 ESA and the development of a Quality Assurance Plan for the successful implementation of the CAP is currently underway.
- **Energizer Factory Complex:** 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.

## CLEAN WATER

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 FY24, the BCRC undertook the following clean water program work:

- Assisted the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) by integrating recommendations from the Basin 1 Tactical Plan into local hazard mitigation plans, projects, and land use plans and regulations.
- Identified actions related to water quality protection outlined in adopted Hazard Mitigation 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 attended monthly meetings of the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance and the Bennington County Conservation District and assisted with their municipal education, public outreach, and water quality improvement projects. Supported work on projects to assess and remediate obstacles to passages for aquatic organisms in North Bennington, Sandgate and Shaftsbury.
- The BCRC 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 thirteen towns and villages in the region to identify, implement, and verify completion of "Grants-in-Aid" water quality improvements to hydrologically connected segments of municipal highways. The Municipal Road General Permit data portal was updated to reflect the completion of these projects.
- The BCRC 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, 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.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

The BCRC continues to play a key role in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. The BCRC provides direct staff support to the State Emergency Operations Center, 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.

- The BCRC continued to support municipalities in developing and updating Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs). BCRC staff worked one-on-one with municipalities that requested extra assistance and sent out individual Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) reports to each municipality. The ERAF Reports highlighted the need for LEMP updates, as well as other ERAF requirements needed to receive more state funding for public infrastructure damage after a declared disaster.
- The BCRC assisted in onboarding new Emergency Management Directors to their roles and provided outreach and training on an as needed basis.
- BCRC staff, in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management Regional Coordinators, hosted a LEMP training refresher in March 2024 for new and returning Emergency Management Directors.
- In October 2023 BCRC staff, in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management Regional Coordinators, hosted a Power Outage Scenario training in Arlington. Officials from the towns of Arlington, Rupert, Sandgate, Shaftsbury, Stamford and Sunderland, as well as a representative from the Vermont Department of Health participated in the exercise.
- The BCRC provided support for development and updates to two local hazard mitigation plans (HMPs). The BCRC completed one local hazard mitigation plan for Stamford and began work on another for Sandgate in November 2023. 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 REMC including meeting scheduling, minute taking, and complying with Vermont's Open Meeting Law.
- 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 three times during the year and assisted Vermont Emergency Management with information regarding impacts from hazardous weather.
- 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.
- 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**

As reported last year, during the multiple storm events that occurred during July 2023, the BCRC was activated as a local liaison between the state and the municipalities in the region. 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 on multiple occasions.

The Bennington region was largely spared in the summer flood events that devastated other areas in the state, however towns in the southwest and northern sections of Bennington County did sustain substantial damages, leading the county to become eligible for Public Assistance (PA) funding. The BCRC helped host the public assistance briefing for southwestern Vermont and continuously worked with local jurisdictions to ensure that they were able to apply for PA funding. The BCRC also joined forces with the region's state representatives for two in-person meetings with residents whose homes were damaged to share information regarding the next steps for their recovery processes. The BCRC continues to provide towns and residents with pertinent recovery information.

Another significant flood event occurred in December when heavy rain combined with snowmelt led to rivers throughout the state reaching moderate to major flood stage. Again, the Bennington region was largely spared damage during this event.

## **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). The BCRC has helped nine municipalities apply for energy resilience “mini grants” and thirteen municipalities apply for free building energy assessments.
- The BCRC has helped a majority of the municipalities in the region develop enhanced energy plans, including Shaftsbury, which is currently in the adoption process. 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. For example, data on local energy usage and efficiency activities were provided to each community as annual updates were received from Efficiency Vermont and other organizations.
- The BCRC attends regular meetings of RPC energy and climate planners. Beginning in the summer of 2022, BCRC and the other RPCs have coordinated with the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS) on an update of the Act 174 energy planning standards and statewide data, providing regional data for the LEAP model, and reviewing draft model outputs.
- The BCRC reviewed and commented on proposals for new renewable energy development in the region and participated in Section 248 proceedings. The regional energy committee reviewed a proposed solar project with a capacity of 20 MW.

- 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.

## **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 and implications for municipalities, production of a municipal health equity guide, and regular updates to the regional Health Planning Primer.
- The BCRC participated in a statewide health equity learning collaborative and acted as a backbone organization for health equity initiatives in Bennington County. As part of this initiative, the BCRC acted as the pass-through entity for \$150,000 that was awarded to five local organizations to advance health equity in the community. This initiative concluded on November 30, 2023.
- The BCRC has continued to serve on a local Continuum of Care committee working to implement solutions outlined in a 2023 Unaccompanied Youth report written by Proscenium Solutions and the BCRC. The committee has developed a resource and service directory for the homeless youth population and partnered with The Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union to attract \$600,000 in grant funding from Vermont AOE that will support tutoring and mentorship efforts in the community over the next three years.
- BCRC staff completed work on the VAPDA Public Health Equity Toolkit, collaborating with the other ten RPCs to develop a toolkit to help municipal leaders increase their awareness, understanding, and capacity for including health equity language in their municipal plans and to help them develop partnerships and resources to advance health equity locally. This project complements the statewide health equity learning collaborative discussed above, that is funded by the Vermont Public Health Institute and the Community Health Equity Partnership “Backbone” program.

## **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.

- The BCRC finalized work under a Bylaw Modernization Grant (BMG) securing updates to the land use regulations for 6 municipalities aimed at removing barriers to housing development. Two additional municipalities are still at work on revisions reflecting these priorities. In addition, the BCRC secured a FY24 BMG for Manchester Village to continue with more comprehensive revisions to the zoning map and land use and development regulations that will include removal of additional permit barriers. This work is further described in the Land Use Planning & Development section of this report.
- On June 11, 2024, the BCRC, the Rutland Regional Commission, and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) hosted a regional Homes for All summit featuring the Homes for All Toolkit developed by the DHCD, small-scale housing developers from the Rutland and Bennington regions, as well as state and regional housing funders and financiers.

## GRANT WRITING

- **Bennington Town Plan:** The BCRC assisted the Town of Bennington to secure a municipal planning grant proposal with a budget of \$31,000 to fund Phase 2 of an effort to develop a new town plan based on the Phase 1 public engagement effort with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. 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 2025.
- **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, 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 \$53,417 grant was used to increase and sustain municipalities' emergency management capabilities by assisting with developing Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs), 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, and providing trainings to the EMDs regarding best practices within emergency management.
- **Building Communities Grants:** BCRC staff assisted two local businesses to secure Building Communities Grants in FY24: a woman/veteran-owned nonprofit providing service dog training at no cost to first responders, and a woman-owned business expanding from tailoring and alterations into an underserved embroidery market. More

details on this program can be found in the Economic & Community Development section above.

- **Shaftsbury Municipal Planning Grant:** The BCRC assisted Shaftsbury to submit an application and secure a \$12,000 FY24 municipal planning grant to conduct a commercial sites inventory and assessment for the South Shaftsbury village center. More details on this project can be found in the Land Use Planning & 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 Land Use Planning & Development section above.

## MAPPING (GIS SERVICES)

The BCRC uses its geographic information systems 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:

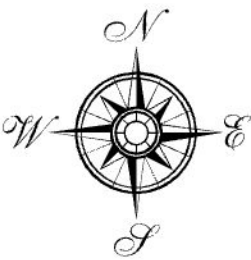
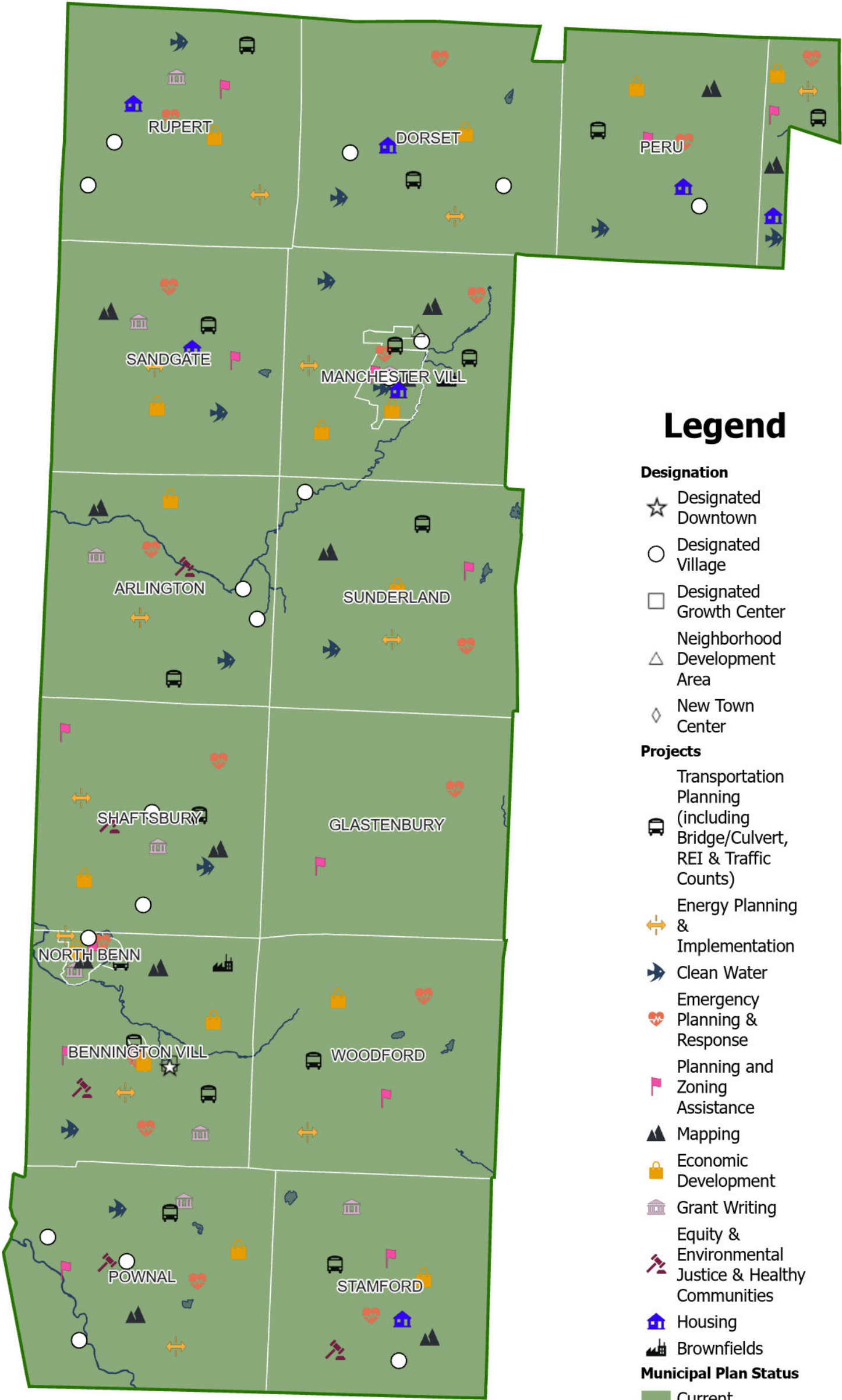
- The BCRC participated with VAPDA partners to finalize proposed future land use mapping categories and provide a preliminary future land use map for the Bennington region for consideration by legislators working on Act 250 changes.
- The BCRC assisted in devising revised zoning maps for Peru, Landgrove, Sandgate, and Shaftsbury.
- The BCRC generated revised renewable energy resource maps showing locations with high potential for renewable energy development as well as areas with significant constraints to development for a draft enhanced energy plan for Shaftsbury.
- The BCRC created a StoryMap about the Egg Mountain parcel in Sandgate and Rupert to describe the natural, historic, and cultural resources on that site, and explain the towns' options for conservation of the land.
- The BCRC developed maps to support the development and improvement of bike-ped facilities/systems in Arlington, Bennington, Pownal, Manchester, and Manchester Village, and maps of regional outdoor recreation facilities including the Bennington Area Trail System (BATS) trail network.
- The BCRC performed mapping of municipal bridges, culverts, and road segments related to stormwater management and municipal road general permits.
- The BCRC produced maps to support the Sunderland village center designation application. The designation was approved by the Downtown Board on March 25, 2024.
- 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 Stamford and Sandate.
- The BCRC worked to acquire GIS layers of municipal water and sewer service lines in Bennington and Manchester. These will be used as a basis for suggested new zoning

overlay districts in which new state-mandated minimum housing density standards will need to be met.

### **‘AT WORK’ MAP**

The BCRC has updated the on-line At Work Map depicting the range of services provided to member municipalities in FY24.

# Bennington County Regional Commission at Work FY 2024



# CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## FY 2024 Annual Report

The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) is a political subdivision of the State created by the municipalities of Chittenden County in 1966 for the development of policies, plans and programs that address regional issues and opportunities in Chittenden County. Its vision is to be a pre-eminent, integrated regional organization that plans for healthy, vibrant communities, economic development, and efficient transportation of people and goods while improving the region's livability. The CCRPC serves as the region's federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and is responsible for comprehensive and collaborative transportation planning involving municipalities, state and federal agencies and other key stakeholders in Chittenden County. The CCRPC works to ensure implementation of the regional transportation plan and provides technical and planning assistance to its member municipalities, and the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans).

The CCRPC is governed by a 29-member board consisting of one representative from each of the County's 19 municipalities; transportation representatives from VTrans, Green Mountain Transit (GMT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Burlington International Airport (BIA), and a rail industry representative; and, at-large members representing the interests of agriculture, environmental conservation, business, and housing/socio-economic. The legislative body of each Chittenden County municipality selects its own representative and alternate. The full CCRPC selects the at-large representatives.

The CCRPC appreciates the continued opportunity to work with its municipal members to plan appropriately for the region's future to protect and improve the special quality of life that is shared throughout Chittenden County. In FY24, the CCRPC invested over \$9.3 million in regional land use, transportation, emergency management, energy, natural resources, public engagement, training, and technical assistance. The program leverages more than \$5.4 million in Federal and State investment with \$263,000 in municipal dues and another \$340,000 in local match for specific projects—a 10:1 return on local investment.

### PLANNING & ZONING

RPCs provide cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and enhanced consultations (on-site training), bylaw modernization, facilitating transition to Development Review Boards and implementing new requirements for energy planning, forest integrity, economic development, housing, and flood resiliency planning. Current and clearly written plans and bylaws are essential to enable efficient state and local permitting. This work is supported through local and regional planning funds, municipal dues, and other grants. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map; highlights include:

- **Town Plan Assistance:** Staff conducted initial plan reviews for Bolton, Hinesburg, St. George, and Williston.



- **Town Plan Approvals:** Approved the 2024 comprehensive plans for Essex, Jericho and South Burlington.
- **Zoning:** CCRPC assisted all its member municipalities with interpretations of the HOME Act's new provisions related to municipal development regulations. CCRPC also initiated a project to support the creation of a master plan and updated zoning bylaws for both East Charlotte and West Charlotte villages and continued supporting the Town of Milton with developing a Town Core Master Plan with associated regulatory changes and capital planning. CCRPC assisted the Town of Essex with a buildout of their sewer service area. CCRPC also helped the City of Burlington develop a scope of work for master planning and development regulations project focused on the City's New North End., Minor zoning-related assistance was also provided to Bolton, Charlotte, Essex Junction, Hinesburg, Huntington, Richmond, Shelburne, South Burlington, Underhill, Westford, and Winooski.
- **Training:** Land Use Essentials trainings were held for the following audiences: Planning Commissions for the Towns of Hinesburg, Charlotte, Huntington, and St. George; Town of Shelburne Planning Commission; and Town of Williston Planning Commission; and a University of Vermont Urban Ecology class. Two Regional Housing Convenings were held for all municipalities in the region to discuss and plan for overcoming regional housing challenges.

RPCs also coordinate 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.

- **ECOS Plan Development and Implementation:** The 2018 Chittenden County ECOS Plan (Environment; Community; Opportunity; Sustainability) is the regional plan for Chittenden County and combines the Regional Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy into one. The ECOS Scorecard monitors the accomplishments and progress indicators for all 17 of the ECOS goals. As an example, we've implemented Strategy #2 (Strive for 80% of new development in areas planned for growth, which amounts to 15% of our land area) through the zoning projects mentioned above, permit legislation, and planned transportation investments in those places resulting in 87% of residential growth in these areas (2022 5-year average). CCRPC used the ECOS Plan to evaluate applications and participate in Act 250 and Section 248 hearings. CCRPC began updating the ECOS plan for the next eight years in FY 2023 for intended adoption in 2025; this effort will be shaped by robust community outreach conducted in 2024 and new statutory requirements under the HOME Act and Act 181. Community engagement efforts related to the ECOS Plan in FY24 were specifically focused on gathering feedback from underrepresented communities. CCRPC's work included attending 20+ community events (300+ people engaged), 6 focus groups (91 people engaged), and releasing a county-wide survey related to ECOS plan goals and actions (365 survey responses).
- **Legislative Forum:** In December, the CCRPC hosted a [Legislative briefing](#) to serve as a forum for municipal representatives and legislators to connect on a few important topics for the upcoming legislative session, including: smart growth issues (infrastructure, permit system, housing, climate/energy, transportation); economic recovery issues (workforce,



broadband); and governance/funding issues (racial equity, open meeting law, regional dispatch start-up, cannabis, transit revenue options, planning funding). CCRPC has also participated in numerous legislative initiatives including development of Act 181 (Act 250 bill).

## BROWNFIELDS

Vermont RPCs have sought and been awarded more than 10 million dollars for this economic development initiative. CCRPC uses these funds to retain several Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) engineering firms to conduct environmental site assessments and prepare clean-up plans to 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.

- **Chittenden County Brownfields Program:** In May 2023, CCRPC secured a competitive EPA grant of \$500,000 for Brownfields Assessment and Cleanup Planning over the next four years to aid property owners, potential developers and municipalities in investigating environmental issues before potential property redevelopment. The CCRPC has also received two \$99,000 grants from ACCD in May 2023 and March 2024 for site assessment and cleanup planning. Using these three grants, CCRPC and its QEPs provided environmental assessment and cleanup planning services at the following properties.
  - Burlington: 227-235 Main Street (Perrywinkle’s Fine Jewelry); 168 Archibald Street (Ahavath Gerim Synagogue); 195-201 Flynn Avenue (Chittenden Solid Waste District); 99 Intervale Road (Intervale Center)
  - Colchester: 182 Hegeman Avenue (Islamic Society of VT / Vermont Construction Company)
  - Essex: 104 Center Road (Potvin Auto)
  - Milton: 214-218 U.S. Route 7 (Town-VTrans “Hourglass” Road reconfiguration project); 25 Railroad Street (Milton Creamery)
  - South Burlington: 600 Spear Street (private property, south of UVM Dairy Barn)
  - Westford: 1705 VT Route 128 (parcel adjacent to Town Office)
  - Williston: 662NXT South Brownell Road (parcel at corner of South Brownell and Williston Roads)
  - Winooski: 32 Malletts Bay Avenue (O’Brien Community Center)

A map detailing these properties (as well as properties assisted in prior years) can be viewed [here](#).

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with towns and in strong partnership with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) to this end in several ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long-term economic gain.

- **Lake Champlain Byway:** Chittenden County includes eight of Lake Champlain Byway’s 22 communities: Milton, Colchester, Winooski, Essex Junction, Burlington, South Burlington, Shelburne, and Charlotte. CCRPC staff maintained the Byway website including a helpful Interactive Map. Additionally, CCRPC continued funding during the summer of 2023 for the Byway's audio stories App & Phone line.

- **Community Development:** CCRPC continued assisting with grant administration on behalf of the Town of Bolton on the CDBG grant for the Bolton Valley Resort and Bolton Valley Community Water and Sewer District (BVCWS) water and wastewater improvements in Bolton. CCRPC continued work as a program manager for community wastewater in Huntington including organizing Wastewater Committee meetings and providing the community with feedback on the draft Preliminary Engineering Report. CCRPC continued work as the grant administrator for two Northern Border Applications (Hinesburg water project and the Lake Champlain Community Sailing Center in Burlington). CCRPC assisted Charlotte with questions regarding village wastewater.
- **Chittenden County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:** With federal funding from the US Economic Development Administration (EDA), CCRPC completed a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in concert with the Addison, Rutland and Central VT regions -- collectively called the West Central Vermont CEDS. The CEDS identifies priority economic development strategies and projects and will be used by a variety of federal and state funding programs when making grant decisions. The West Central Vermont CEDS was approved by EDA in June 2023. CEDS partners continued working together in FY24 to develop an application to become an EDA-recognized Economic Development District.

## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Through contracts with VTrans, RPCs coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public and municipal involvement in planning for 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 region'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 improvements.

The CCRPC also serves the region as the sole Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) operating within Vermont. MPOs are federally mandated and funded transportation planning organizations for urbanized areas with population greater than 50,000 and are governed by representatives from local municipalities and state transportation agencies. Congress created MPOs to ensure that transportation projects and programs in urbanized areas are based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive ("3-C") planning process that serve the needs of the municipalities in the metropolitan area.

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

**TAC Activity:** The TAC met 9 times in FY24. Seventeen member municipalities have been actively engaged in transportation planning and TAC attendance varied from 12 to 23 members. Nine (9) non-municipal TAC members were actively engaged in transportation planning in the county.

**TAC Outcomes:** The TAC approved, discussed, received presentations, and/or made recommendations on the following projects/tasks:

- Transportation Resiliency Planning Tool (TRPT)
- Safety Targets for (federal) performance measures
- Local Motion Chittenden County Active Transportation Survey
- Green Mountain Transit (GMT) Safety and Asset Performance Targets
- FY25 UPWP Development
- Colchester Public Works – Shifting to ArcGIS Online for Asset Management
- CCRPC Equity Work Updates
- Health Equity Toolkit
- Net Zero VT Walk to Shop Program Updates
- SFY25 Transportation Capital Program Review
- Class 1 Town Highway Reclassification Study
- Shelburne Bike Parking Survey Tool
- Complete Streets Reporting
- Carbon Reduction Strategy and GHG Transportation Performance Target
- Speed Countermeasures Toolbox
- Consultant Selection for Land Use Planning and Development Regulation Services
- Act 250 Updates

***Transportation Coordination Activities with Municipalities and VTrans Provided by CCRPC:***

- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) coordination
- Municipal Project Management sidewalk projects (Jericho, Richmond, Shelburne)
- MRGP
- Regional O&D Committee
- ITS coordination
- EV-related coordination
- Performance measures & Targets
- MS2 data coordination
- Transportation Equity Planning
- VTrans Carbon Reduction Strategy coordination
- Chittenden County Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan
- Milton Downtown Core Development
- Burlington-Winooski Bridge Project
- US7/Harbor Road/Falls Road Scope Refinement
- Winooski Main Street redevelopment project collaboration
- Williston Class 1 Reclassification Pilot
- Richmond Gateway Feasibility Study
- Bike/Pedestrian Bridge over I-89 Connections Study
- Richmond US2 Shoulder “Pinch Points” Study
- Exit 14 Scoping Study.

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

**Regional Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):** The [2023 MTP](#) was adopted by the CCRPC Board on May 17, 2023.

**Municipal Transportation Plans:** 18 municipalities have current municipal plans that include an updated transportation component. In FY24, the CCRPC assisted three (3) municipalities (Bolton, Hinesburg and Williston) with the transportation elements of their municipal plans.

**Act-250 and Section 248 Reviews:** In FY24, the CCRPC provided transportation related comments for seven (7) Act-250 applications.

**Coordination with Public Transit Providers:** Staff participated in regional public transit planning activities including:

- O&D Committee
- O&D Transportation Summit Committee
- Northwest Vermont TOD RAISE Grant
- Williston Microtransit Study Advisory Committee
- Support letters drafted for GMT grant applications

**RPC participation in VTrans committees:** A list of committees that the CCRPC staff participated in is provided below:

- O&D Transportation Summit Committee
- Rail Council
- Burlington Winooski Bridge Project
- Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC)

**Project Prioritization:** Typically, the CCRPC prioritizes Capital Projects on the state's Transportation Program once a year using the VPSP2 prioritization methodology but in FY24 VTrans paused this process for the year.

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

During FY24, the CCRPC hosted regional transportation meetings; initiated, managed, and was involved in major regional and local transportation plans, studies, and initiatives; provided technical assistance and support to municipalities and partners on transportation issues. Please see below for more information on these activities.

**Assistance with Transportation Grants:** Provided grant assistance and support letters to Burlington, Hinesburg, Huntington, Jericho, Milton, Williston, Shelburne, and South Burlington.

**Budget Spent on Municipal Assistance:** The CCRPC invests approximately 70% of MPO funding for municipal assistance.

### **CCRPC Data Collection in FY24:**

- Pavement Condition inventories were completed in Burlington and Milton.
- A sign Inventory was completed in Hinesburg.

- Culvert Inventories were completed in Jericho and Hinesburg.

***Participation in Transportation Planning and Project Development Activities:*** Below is a list of transportation planning, project definition (scoping), and water quality/transportation projects that the CCRPC managed in FY24 as well as Municipal Project Management (MPM) services provided to three municipalities:

- Charlotte Public Outreach Study to Determine Transportation & Parking Needs
- Milton Downtown Core Development
- Burlington South End Multimodal Facility and TOD Study
- South Burlington Traffic Impact Fee
- Burlington Impact Fee Study
- Route 116 Crosswalk Improvements
- Richmond Gateway Feasibility Study
- Bike/Pedestrian Bridge over I-89 Connections Study
- Universal Access to and within Burlington Parks
- Intermodal connections for the Burlington Amtrak service
- Jericho Corners to Riverside Path Scoping
- Lafountain and Dion Street Scoping Study
- Richmond US2 Shoulder “Pinch Points” Study
- Exit 14 Scoping Study
- Shelburne St / Home Ave Intersection Scoping
- Northern Waterfront Connectivity Study
- Cottage Grove, Stanbury Road, and Green Acres Drive Sidewalk Scoping
- Underhill Center Active Transportation Scoping Study
- UVM TRC Transportation Sustainability Tracking Tool
- Right-of-Way Condition Inventory for Stormwater Retrofit Feasibility
- Essex Stormwater CCTV Inspection
- Essex Junction Stormwater CCTV Inspection.
- Municipal Project Management sidewalk projects (Jericho, Richmond, Shelburne).

The CCRPC managed the following multimodal Regional and Corridor Studies:

- Chittenden County Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan
- Battery Street Corridor Study
- Winooski Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan
- South Burlington Walk/Bike Master Plan
- Richmond Bike/Ped Master Plan

The CCRPC was involved in the following Transportation Demand Management (TDM) initiatives:

- The CCRPC began work on a Regional Transportation Options Plan to assess the feasibility of transportation demand management (TDM) options, and advance recommendations of both the 2023 [Metropolitan Transportation Plan](#) (MTP) and the Chittenden County [I-89 2050](#)

[Study](#).

- CCRPC staff participated in CATMA's 2nd Annual Transportation Summit and their [Transportation Coordinator](#) (TC) Network program and events to learn from other TC Network members about employee TDM benefits and programs.
- CCRPC continued to support and collaborate with TDM partners including CarShare VT, Local Motion, and Go! Vermont.

**Road Erosion Inventories in Support of Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP):** CCRPC staff continued to work with all Chittenden County municipalities on meeting their MRGP obligations. This includes evaluating segments through Road Erosion Inventories (REIs), tracking and documenting upgraded segments and outlets, and reporting to DEC (see [REI dashboard here](#)). In FY24, the CCRPC completed REI inventories in Jericho and Shelburne, with additional inspections in Richmond, Underhill, and Westford.

#### **Objective #4: Advance VTrans Strategic and Long-Range Transportation Plans**

**CCRPC Data Collection Activities Conducted Specifically for VTrans:** CCRPC staff conducted the following activities in support of VTrans' Plans:

- Park and Ride counts completed on July 9<sup>th</sup> and October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023; and February 15<sup>th</sup> and July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024.
- 27 ATRs in Burlington, Shelburne, Charlotte, South Burlington, Richmond, Williston, Westford, Hinesburg, and Huntington
- 10 turning movements counts in Burlington, Colchester, Hinesburg, and South Burlington.

**Objective #5: Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education:** CCRPC staff conducted the following outreach/education activities beyond that of routine task efforts:

- Staff from CCRPC, City of Winooski, and consultant VHB conducted extensive outreach as part of creating the City's first Walk Bike Plan. Given the City's diverse population and languages, the team engaged with the public at 24 different events, meetings, and interviews and gathered more than 1,000 individual comments regarding walking and biking using in person and online tools.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center when needed, administrative support to the Regional Emergency Planning Committees, and coordination among responders and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPCs also help update floodplain bylaws and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency operations plans and assisted as needed in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene and other disasters.

- **Hazard Mitigation Plan Monitoring & Maintenance:** CCRPC collected information from each municipality on annual progress made toward the implementation of hazard mitigation activities recommended in their Municipal All-Hazard Mitigation Plans. CCRPC

also reported progress to VEM on annual activities by CCRPC to implement tasks detailed in the 2022 Chittenden County Multi-Jurisdictional All-Hazards Mitigation Plan.

- **Local Emergency Management Plans:** 18 out of 19 municipalities in the CCRPC region currently have completed their updated local emergency management plan. Buel's Gore is not required to adopt a LEMP but does maintain a working version to guide Emergency Response.
- **Regional Emergency Planning Committee:** CCRPC continued to staff the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) which consists of two representatives from each municipality and others involved in emergency management in Chittenden County. The purpose of the REMC is to coordinate and support regional all-hazard emergency planning and preparedness activities to improve the region's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from all disasters.
- **Local Liaison:** CCRPC served as a key coordinator between municipalities and the state to collect damage assessment information after significant storm events.
- **Hazardous Materials:** Helped with emergency preparedness for hazardous materials incidents by exporting the Tier data for Chittenden County from Tier II Submit to a table format and provided a list of facilities and chemicals to each EMD in the county.
- **Flood Hazard and River Corridor Bylaws.** CCRPC reviewed the flood hazard and River Corridor bylaws for 19 out of 19 (100%) of our municipalities to ensure conformance with minimum National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and State standards.
- **Response to July 2023 Flooding.** In response to the July 2023 flooding, CCRPC staff fulfilled duties required under the MOU with Vermont Emergency Management (staffing the State Emergency Operations Center and collecting information on damages). In addition, CCRPC directly assisted town zoning staff in Bolton, Richmond and Milton with completing Substantial Damage Assessments of impacted properties. As part of the Agency of Natural Resources' Flood Hazard Bylaw Update Services contract, CCRPC will continue to review municipal floodplain regulations, help municipalities update them to current NFIP minimums, and support municipalities who wish to implement additional protections. Finally, CCRPC disseminated information about flooding and recovery, which included publishing a page of flood disaster recovery resources for municipalities on its website and connected municipal officials with the SEOC and other state and federal contacts and resources to coordinate financial and logistical assistance.

## MAPPING

In addition to enhancing the RPC work, RPCs provide municipalities, state agencies and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects.

- **Town-Specific Web Maps:** Updated/created interactive town-specific web maps, story maps, or dashboards for Burlington, Bolton, Buel's Gore, Charlotte, Essex, Essex Junction, Huntington, Jericho, Richmond, and Shelburne.
- **Regional Web Maps:** Updated the ECOS Map Viewer, River Corridor Planning map viewer, regional bike facilities, broadband status and Permit Review map viewer with more current data. Maintained our [Housing Dashboard](#), a map viewer that allows user to see the location and type of housing in each municipality.
- **Town Plan Maps:** Updated maps for the Jericho Town Plan.



- **GIS Data:** Developed or updated numerous GIS datasets (ash tree inventories, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) sign inventories, road maps, zoning, culverts, housing points, scenic resources, state designations, trails, conserved land, utilities, etc.) for Bolton, Charlotte, Colchester, Essex Junction, Huntington, Jericho, Milton, Richmond, Shelburne, South Burlington, Williston, and for the region.
- **Data available via Vermont Open Data Portal:** Uploaded housing points and municipal zoning and overlay data to the portal to allow public access to the GIS data.
- **VT Culverts:** The VT Culverts website can be used to view a town's bridges and culverts on a map, or in a chart based on condition or inventory date. CCRPC staff is one of two RPCs that manage the website. VT Culverts continues to gain traction in our region and throughout the state. At the end of June, 9 of our municipalities have actively used VT Culverts to inventory town-maintained bridges and culverts.

## ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

A renewed focus on clean, renewable, sustainable and affordable energy presents Vermont with great opportunity and significant challenges. RPCs integrate energy planning with land use, transportation and natural resources efforts, and 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.

- **Regional Energy Plan:** The *2018 Chittenden County ECOS Plan* was granted an Affirmative Determination of Energy Compliance by the Department of Public Service on August 9, 2018. Given new statutory requirements and revised LEAP and renewable electricity generation data, CCRPC completed substantial updates to Supplement 6 of the *ECOS Plan*, the Enhanced Energy Plan, in preparation for adoption of a revised *ECOS Plan* in 2025. CCRPC also participated in PUC proceedings (applications for Certificates of Public Good and various investigations) to ensure that local and regional policies are recognized. CCRPC participated in 15 PUC proceedings in FY24.
- **Municipal Energy Plans:** The CCRPC board granted affirmative determinations of energy compliance to re-adopted enhanced energy plans in Jericho and South Burlington. Fifteen municipalities have adopted enhanced energy plans. CCRPC assisted South Burlington in development and adoption of a Climate Action Plan and a supplemental implementation plan focused on the transportation sector.
- **Energy Planning Implementation:** CCRPC provided technical support to municipalities regarding the state-wide [Municipal Energy Resilience Program](#) (MERP) for municipal buildings and other energy and climate-related grant and incentive programs. CCRPC facilitated coordination with the State Climate Action Office, the Public Service Department, and other state partners on potential funding and programs for municipalities.
- **State Energy Planning:** CCRPC gave feedback to the PUC on new net metering rules; and assisted the Vermont Department of Public Service with engagement related to the Department's comprehensive review of Vermont's renewable and clean electricity policies and programs. CCRPC has also served on VLCT's environment policy committee.



## CLEAN WATER

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the EPA-required watershed tactical basin plans. RPCs also work with municipalities to implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations for better and safer growth management decisions.

- **Clean Water:** The CCRPC continued to host the Clean Water Advisory Committee and the MS-4 Sub-Committee and provide guidance to the State on disposition of the Vermont Clean Water Fund. CCRPC staff also sit on the Lake Champlain Sea Grant Program Advisory Committee, and managed Design Implementation Block Grant projects on behalf of select towns to design stormwater treatment practices. The CCRPC supported education programs such as the Rethink Runoff on behalf of nine of our municipalities, assisted with watershed resiliency mapping, and participated in water quality-focused policy discussions. CCRPC appoints representatives to three different Basin Water Quality Councils which work with their Clean Water Service Providers (CWSP) to oversee the development and implementation of non-regulatory water quality improvement projects that reduce phosphorus loading into these streams and Lake Champlain. These three Councils are the Basin 5 Water Quality Council (BWQC) for the Northern Lake Champlain Direct Drainages, the Basin 7 Water Quality Council for the Lamoille River watershed and the Basin 8 Water Quality Council for the Winooski watershed. Bolton is in Basin 8. Additionally, CCRPC is the designated CWSP for Basin 5.
- **Block Grants:** Through funding provided by the DEC and administered by the Mount Ascutney Regional Planning Commission, the CCRPC managed Design Implementation Block Grants to implement the following stormwater projects: in Burlington, managed a grant to create a new gravel wetland to treat runoff from both the Champlain Housing Trust property and the Market 32 / Price Chopper property near Shelburne Road and assisted the Town of Hinesburg with management of a grant to design, permit, and construct a treatment practice to address stormwater runoff from the former Saputo Cheese Factory.
- **Water Quality Outreach:** CCRPC is managing, with all RPCs as sub-grantees, a grant provided from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to conduct a multi-pronged outreach effort focused on improving water quality in compliance with the Vermont Clean Water Act (VCWA). CCRPC continues work with municipal staff and boards to provide information about the requirements for municipalities triggered by the VCWA and also work with them on options such as stronger municipal protections against flood hazards and river corridor erosion, stormwater master planning, and other town plan or zoning changes to improve water quality.

### **Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) Compliance and Water Quality Planning Assistance:**

- CCRPC staff continued to work with all Chittenden County municipalities on meeting their MRGP obligations. This includes evaluating segments through Road Erosion Inventories (REIs), tracking and documenting upgraded segments and outlets, and reporting to DEC (see [REI dashboard here](#)). In FY24, the CCRPC completed REI inventories in Jericho and Shelburne, with additional inspections in Richmond, Underhill, and Westford.
- Staff also assist municipalities with the State's Grants in Aid (GIA) program, which allocates funding to participating towns for stormwater improvements related to the

MRGP. In FY24, 7 Chittenden County municipalities are actively participating in the GIA program. An estimated 16 non-compliant segments will be upgraded using the allocated \$171,000.

## EQUITY & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

- **Public Engagement and Racial Equity:** The CCRPC continued to build organizational capacity to address systemic racism and inequities in our communities through the following actions:
  - Supported a new full time Equity & Engagement Manager to lead organizational and project-specific equity and racial justice efforts.
  - Developed an equity webpage to provide updates on organizational equity-related work.
  - Developed and adopted an organizational equity statement in collaboration with the Equity Advisory Committee.
  - Supported and facilitated an Equity Advisory Committee. The Equity Advisory Committee worked on the organizational Equity Statement, Core Values, and a Code of Conduct for CCRPC staff and representatives. The EAC also supported and advised community engagement for the ECOS Plan update.
  - Facilitated and provided educational opportunities for our staff, municipalities, and other local and regional partners.
  - Strengthened existing relationships and partnerships and forged new ones with community organizations, grassroots organizers, and individuals working directly with marginalized communities.
  - Drafted an organizational Equity Action Plan building off of recommendations from the Creative Discourse Group's [Organizational Equity Assessment](#).
  - Participated in equity-working groups through the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's (GARE) national network of equity practitioners in local, state, and regional government.
- **Building Homes Together:** The Building Homes Together campaign is a collaboration between CCRPC, Champlain Housing Trust, and Evernorth that focuses on the production of much-needed housing in Chittenden County through outreach, education, and advocacy efforts. The Building Homes Together 2.0 campaign was launched in fall 2021 with the goal of building 5,000 homes by 2025 for people of all incomes, including at least 1,250 affordable homes. Review the latest housing data, infographics, and press releases [here](#).
- **Public Health:** A grant from the Vermont Department of Health enabled CCRPC to work with all the RPCs in the state and Vermont Health Department staff to create the Vermont [Health Equity Planning Toolkit](#). CCRPC hosted a training on the healthy equity toolkit for the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), shared health equity project information with the CCRPC's Equity Advisory Committee (EAC) and worked with the EAC as part of toolkit implementation. CCRPC staff also began creating a Chittenden County Resources Distribution and Impact Map Viewer and developed an online Chittenden County Demographic Map Viewer including layers on race and ethnicity, disability, poverty status, and English ability.

- **Chittenden County Communications Union District (CCCUD):** CCRPC assisted [the CCCUD](#) as they explored opportunities to provide high-speed internet access to under- or unserved addresses in their 8-municipality district. After much deliberation, the CCCUD voted to submit an application to the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) for available funds to bring high-speed internet access to half of the under- and unserved addresses in its district.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

The CCRPC receives most of its funding through performance-based grants and contracts with the state. Town assessments constitute a small but very important percentage of our funding. Individual municipalities also contribute match dollars for some federally funded transportation planning projects within their own borders. For FY24, the CCRPC's total budgeted revenue of over \$9.3 million dollars was derived from over 71% federally funded grants, 25% state funding, and 4% from municipalities and non-profit organizations. Over \$6.2 million, over 66% of the total budgeted funding, was passed through to consultants or sub-grantees.

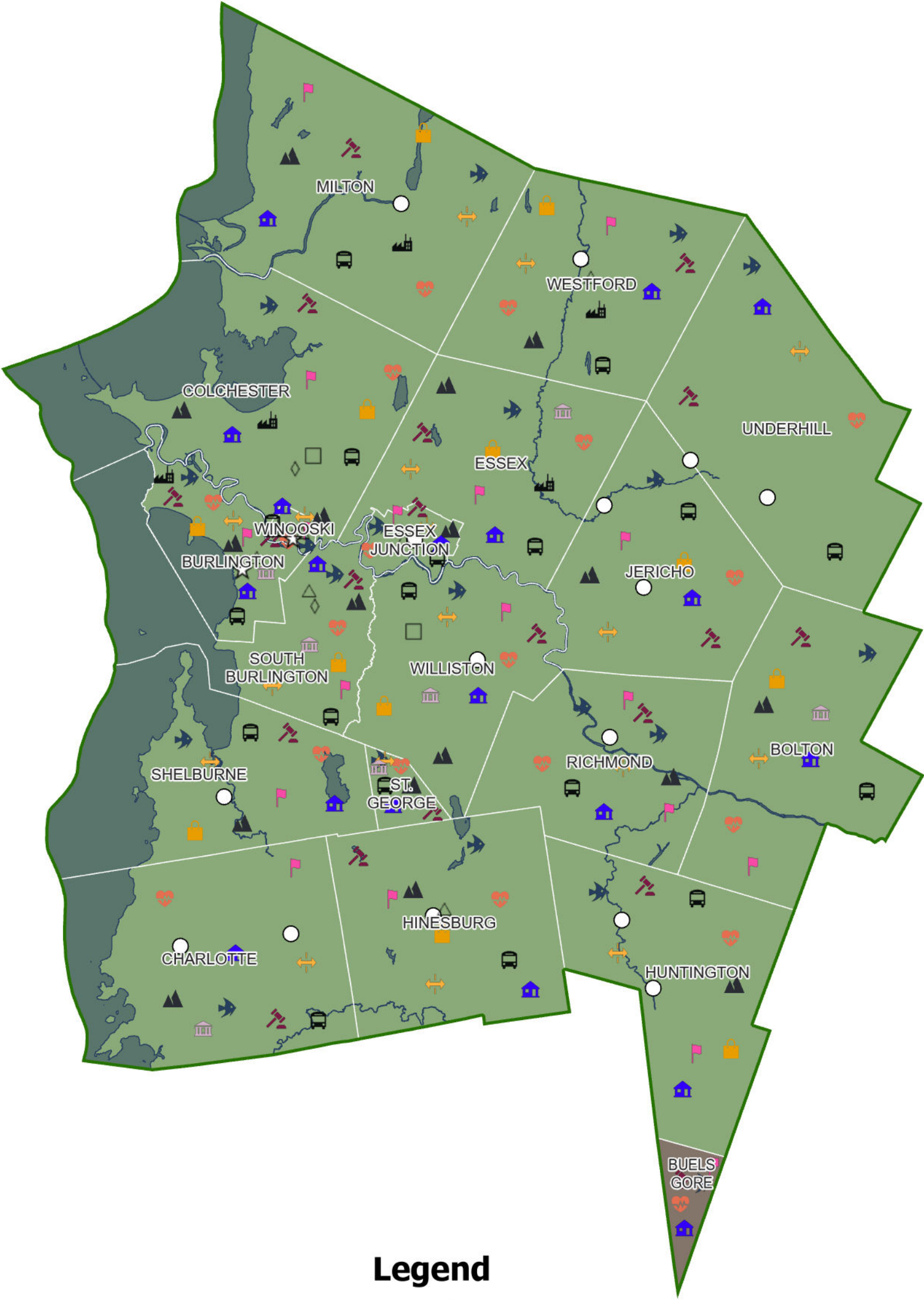
All of the CCRPC's revenue sources are tied to federal, state, or municipal agreements with scopes of work, guidelines and/or performance measures. CCRPC works with our members and VTrans to decide the best way to invest our MPO funding annually in developing our Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Municipal dues, and the funding received through the CCRPC's performance agreement with ACCD, are also necessary to provide matching funds required by grantors. The grants we receive enable us to work with our municipalities on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, brownfields redevelopment, energy, public health, and natural resources. Revenue from federal and state grantors typically requires non-federal matching funds. Required match ranges from 10 percent (transportation planning) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant).

The CCRPC conducts a single audit on an annual basis. The federal single audit field work will be conducted in the fall of 2024, with the full report to be completed by December 2024.

## **'AT WORK' MAP**

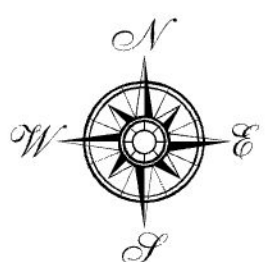
The map depicting the range of services provided by the CCRPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

- |                               |  |                                |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Designation</b>            | New Town Center  | Clean Water                    | Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities |
| Designated Downtown           | <b>Projects</b>  | Emergency Planning & Response  | Housing  |
| Designated Village            | Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts) | Planning and Zoning Assistance | Brownfields  |
| Designated Growth Center      | Energy Planning & Implementation   | Mapping                        | <b>Municipal Plan Status</b>                         |
| Neighborhood Development Area |  | Economic Development           | Current  |
|                               |  | Grant Writing                  | Expired  |
|                               |  |                                | No Town Plan   |





# CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## FY 2024 Annual Report

Founded in 1967, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) leverages the power of people working together to assist its 23 member-municipalities in providing effective local government and to work cooperatively to address regional issues. CVRPC is governed by representatives from the 20 municipalities of Washington County and Orange, Washington, and Williamstown in Orange County. Each legislative body selects a representative to the Commission.

### PLANNING & ZONING

RPCs act as a cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education, enhanced consultations (on-site training), bylaw modernization, facilitating transition to Development Review Boards and implementing new requirements for economic development and flood resiliency planning. Current and clear plans and bylaws are essential in smooth state and local permitting. This work is supported through local and regional planning funds, local contributions and other grants. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map; highlights include:

#### Municipal Planning:

- Met with towns of Cabot, Marshfield, Waitsfield, Washington and the City of Montpelier to discuss the process and requirements for updating their municipal plans.
- Under the Municipal Technical Assistance Program completed needs and opportunity assessments for low-capacity municipalities as identified by AOA. Met with municipalities one-on-one to review areas where planning goals aligned with available programs.
- Discussed strategies for prioritizing natural resources with the Middlesex Planning Commission and the Waterbury Conservation Commission.

#### Municipal Plan Approvals/Confirmations/Energy Certifications:

- Approved and confirmed one municipal plan and planning processes and additionally issued one Determination of Energy Compliance.

#### Zoning:

- Undertook research and provided one planning commission (Northfield) with regulatory approaches for specific base zoning density.
- Discussed cannabis-related language in draft zoning bylaws (Plainfield)
- Facilitated early conversations between two municipalities to share a ZA position.

#### State Designations:

- Presented Village Center Designation renewal information to one town (Marshfield). Assisted one municipality (Waterbury Center) with Village Center Designation renewal application. Assisted one municipality (Barre Town) with four new Village Center Designation Applications. Provided preliminary support and information to one municipality (Barre City) about Downtown Designation renewal program and application

process. Provided preliminary map of Village Center to Woodbury Planning Commission for their consideration. Participated in preliminary discussion regarding a tri-town Neighborhood Development Area designation with representatives from Moretown and Waterbury.

#### **Training and Education:**

- Held one Planning and Zoning training (Essentials of land use planning and regulation) to build knowledge of current and emerging planning issues for new and existing members of planning commissions.
- Hosted an Act 250 Training for the CVRPC Board of Commissioners with Act 250 District coordinators to build shared understanding of the program in its current form in preparation for the possible legislative updates.

#### **Recreation Planning:**

- Attended VT Trails and Greenways Council Annual Meeting, focused on accessible and adaptive recreational opportunities across the region. Prepared a letter of support for initiative by the Waterbury Lands Initiative and the Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation to acquire land adjacent to the C.C. Putnam State Forest.

## **REGIONAL PLANNING**

RPCs coordinate 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.

In FY24, CVRPC continued efforts to draft a new regional plan, including collaborating with RPCs statewide to develop methodologies for creating municipal housing targets and consistent land use designations on the Future Land Use Map. In addition to ongoing drafting and revisions of the plan's elements, staff developed and worked on integrating an equity tool, conducted stakeholder interviews, and categorized and analyzed approximately 2,500 individual municipal actions and strategies from the Region's 23 town plans.

Due to time constraints and new state legislation that shifted RPCs' responsibilities and authority, CVRPC began the process to readopt its Regional Plan to remain in compliance with statutory requirements while drafting continued on a new regional plan. The new regional plan update is scheduled for adoption in FY25.

CVRPC also focused on plan implementation. A sampling of activities includes:

- Monitored Act 250 and Section 248 applications.
- Provided Preferred Siting Letters of Support to two proposed solar projects applying for Section 248 permits.
- Commented on one proposed housing development applying for an Act 250 permit that was evaluated to have a substantial regional impact.
- Regional
- Continued work on the regional plan update including gathering data, drafting chapters, and developing an outreach and communication plan. Staff collaborated with the CVRPC Regional Plan Committee on the drafting of the new regional plan.

- Completed comparative analysis between the 2024 Worcester Long Range Management Plan and the 2016 CVRPC Regional Plan. Participated in public hearing meeting.
- Engaged in Act 59 Community Resilience and Biodiversity Act public comment process:
  - Participated in VT Housing and Conservation Board "Conservation Categories Roundtable"
  - Participated in Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative Municipalities Focus Group
- Following the July 2023 flooding, the CVRPC Board of Commissioners developed regional flood mitigation and planning priorities for the region.

## **BROWNFIELDS**

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.

In FY24, CVRPC facilitated the completion of a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment and Corrective Action Plan on behalf of a multi-unit (25 units) housing development project in Northfield. A dam removal project site in Cabot was enrolled in the program as was a site anticipated to be the administrative offices, recycling center and permanent hazardous waste drop-off center of Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with towns and in strong partnership with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) to this end in a number of ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic gain.

### **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:**

The CEDS is a partnership among RPCs and RDCs in Central Vermont, Rutland, Addison, and Chittenden Counties, and the Vermont Department of Economic Development. The effort focuses on economic development strategies. A CEDS unlocks future federal EDA investments for infrastructure development, job creation, and revolving loan funds. The CEDS was adopted by CVRPC and its partners and subsequently received federal Economic Development Administration approval. In 2024, the work of this group transitioned to the development of an Economic Development District (EDD) application and to these ends CVRPC staff served as the program staff for the EDD Board.

### **Grant Writing and Administration:**

- Assisted municipalities in Regional Priority Project applications.
- Served as Local Development District for NBRC to support the Cross VT Trail and Neck of the Woods Childcare in Waitsfield.

### **Broadband Development:**

Provided administrative support to CVFiber, Central Vermont's Communications Union District. CVFiber has initiated the construction of fast, affordable broadband in the region.

### **Regional Project Prioritization:**

- Coordinated with municipalities, regional non-profits, and CVEDC to set regional priorities among economic development projects. The regional project list serves as an investment guide for the State.

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

- Served as core leadership member of THRIVE (Central Vermont Community Health Equity Partnership backbone).
- Developed and hosted *Planning for Health Equity* workshop for municipalities and health equity partners to incorporate health equity into their town plans and bylaws. Distributed Walk-to-Shop trolleys to food shelves and other food distribution centers within municipalities.
- Adapted Hot Weather Preparedness Planning resources and guidance for Central Vermont region, began developing municipal workshop to support local planning efforts including regional and municipal scale maps of vulnerabilities, conditions, and existing shelter locations (VDH).

Work foci included coordination of acute and long-term response to temporary housing exodus and spike in unhoused community members in Montpelier, Barre City, Berlin, and Barre Town in partnership with municipalities and regional community health partners; as well as, coordinated flood response supporting frontline communities including coordination with utilities on expansion of existing assistance programs to accommodate accessible flood adders.

### **Regional Planning**

CVRPC developed and worked on integrating an equity tool into the regional plan and conducted stakeholder interviews.

### **Energy Planning**

RPCs work closely with local, regional, and statewide partners to rapidly update and develop tools, resources, and programs to help municipalities take advantage of evolving funding landscapes and meet longstanding physical and social infrastructure needs and goals to reduce energy burden, emissions, and promote community-scale energy equity and resilience. RPCs participate in Section 248 proceedings and support comprehensive planning at the local, regional, and state levels to inform permitting process as well as towards GHG emissions, energy equity, reliability, and resilience goals.

- Participated in the Energy Equity Project Community of Practice cohort: a national collaborative effort to create a standardized framework for energy equity measurement, reporting, and tracking that drives clean energy investment and impact for BIPOC and frontline communities.
  - Adapted just transitions' guiding principles and rubric for regional plan process, engagement, and draft review.

## **HOUSING**

- Completed a housing infill analysis for Barre City identifying municipally owned vacant parcels and privately-owned sub-dividable parcels in the municipality that could support ADUs and new housing development.



- Discussed development trends and planning for infill housing with the Waterbury Housing Taskforce.
- Developed a Central Vermont Guide to Creating an ADU for use by residents to develop Accessory Dwelling Units.
- Developed scope and solicited design services for an ADU conversion program for existing structures. Eligible applicants are regional homeowners.
- Assisted municipalities in community housing needs assessments.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

Through our contract with the VTrans, CVRPC coordinates the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the 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.

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

- Held nine Transportation Advisory Committee meetings, with 19 municipalities regularly attending and engaging in the TPI. Meetings included regular attendance by GMT, VTRANS and various other institutional partners. TAC meetings provide an opportunity to gather community expertise and guide regional transportation planning.
- Coordinated activities between municipalities and VTrans, including the regional mobility committee, new project summaries, and regional transit coordination.
- Reviewed VTrans sponsored projects for regional and municipal concerns and participated VTrans led project meetings. Coordinated the completion of VTrans new project summaries with municipalities.

### **Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning**

- Maintained a current regional transportation plan (within 8 years).
- Reviewed Act 250 applications; no comments required relating to transportation.
- Reviewed Section 248 applications; no comments required relating to transportation.
- Coordinated activities in support of regional public transit providers, including representing Washington County on the GMT Board, and regular regional mobility committee meetings.
- Hosted the Central Vermont Mobility Committee. This committee serves as a forum for local transit providers and stakeholders to discuss how transit is provided to central Vermonters who are generally unable to utilize the standard services of GMT.
- Overhauled data and regional analysis in new regional plan element to clarify regional situation and promote greater rigor in future decision making.
- Provided grant/project management for Mad River Path VT-100 Corridor Study to connect the Valley from Warren Falls to the Cross Vermont Trail at US-2

### **Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities**

- Continued to support municipal efforts to address flood risks for Barre City associated with Trestle #308. Staff attended VTrans preliminary engineering findings presentation.
- Designed traffic calming/speed reduction demonstration projects for Middlesex and Calais
- Provided capacity estimates and concept design for Cabot town parking for July 4<sup>th</sup> parade.
- Consulted with towns on traffic calming in East Montpelier Village and Marshfield Village. Provided data support to, and participated in, Middlesex Road Committee meeting to help members define their problem and understand the contours of their solution space.
- Consulted with Moretown on counts (car and bike) and speed studies (car) on US-2 and VT-100B to support and inform safety improvement efforts.
- Participated in multi-town conversation on where joint gravel purchasing can be supported to reduce costs for CVRPC towns.
- Worked with Mad River Path to develop a scope of work for a corridor study along route 100 and 100B. Helped MRP Successfully apply for VTrans funding to complete study.
- TOD RAISE - Began transit oriented development study with the municipalities of Berlin, Barre City and Northfield. These studies will be completed with funding through the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission.

### **Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans**

- Conducted 30 data collection activities specifically for VTrans (traffic counts, park and ride surveys, pedestrian counts, etc., bridge and culvert surveys)

### **Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education**

- Facilitated meetings of the Central Vermont Mobility Committee (formerly the Regional Elderly and Disabled Persons Advisory Committee) to discuss service and rider engagement strategies.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play key roles in the preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, Department of Public Safety, VTrans, the Agency of Natural Resources, and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs). RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the LEPCs and coordination among responders, municipal officials, and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPCs also help update floodplain bylaws, river corridor regulations, and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans. RPCs coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans and assist as needed in special circumstances like the July 2023 flooding and other federally and non-federally declared disasters. The RPCs are a source of technical support and information and provide coordination and collaboration for trainings, workshops and seminars, often in conjunction with partners.

**Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs) & Implementation:**

- Assisted Barre City, Waitsfield, and Waterbury in developing LHMP updates. Assisted Cabot to complete Local Hazard Mitigation Plan update. Integrated extreme temperature planning, climate resilience, and frontline community impacts into LHMPs. Of the Region's 23 municipalities 13 have a FEMA-approved plan and three are being reviewed by VEM with an additional 6 were in process.

**Local Emergency Management Plans:**

- Assisted 23 municipalities with plan development, 18 of 21 plans submitted by July 1, 2024, and accepted by Vermont Emergency Management by end of FY24.

**Planning Assistance:**

- Supported Capital Fire Mutual Aid in Congressional Discretionary Spending request for communications upgrade funding. Created and distributed ERAF reports to 19 municipalities.
- Assisted Capital Fire Mutual Aid to meet Vermont Open Meeting Law requirements by hosting minutes and documents on CVRPC's website.

**State Support:**

- Provided State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) support by contacting towns to ascertain damages and by acting as supplemental staff to the SEOC Situational Awareness Unit. Attended stakeholder meetings and provided input in the State Hazard Mitigation Plan process. Attended the State Integrated Preparedness Planning workshop. Provided administrative support and scheduled speakers for Central Vermont Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC). Four meetings were held in FY24.

**July 2023 and 2024 flooding:**

While the following description focuses on the work completed following the July 2023 flooding, many of these same activities were repeated during the July 2024 flooding.

During and following the flooding, staff provided technical assistance, support, and auxiliary capacity on myriad questions, concerns, and needs when municipal resources were stretched thin responding to the disaster on the ground and taking care of their residents. The RPC was there to assist local leaders and staff when they needed to understand their options and how to engage with state and federal partners and resources. At this time, the RPC has transitioned back to a planning role, ensuring that we learn from recent events and provide our municipalities with the resources and assistance they need to mitigate the impacts of future disasters, become more resilient, and ultimately thrive.

Under the RPC **memorandum of understanding** with the Department of Public Safety for disaster response CVRPC staff participated in the following activities:

**Local Liaison:** During the 7/10/23 and the 7/10/24 storms, staff were activated on to contact the 23 municipalities within the CV planning region and enter information into the WebEOC portal. Information related isolated residents, emergency situations, risks to life, observed damage to public and private facilities, economic impacts, and status of cultural landmarks was reported back to Vermont Emergency Management (VEM). Helped municipalities submit tickets for emergency assistance to VEM.

Under the annual RPC **Emergency Management Performance Grant**, staff provided the following technical assistance to support municipalities as they responded to the flooding and eventually began the transition to the recovery process:

- Monitored possible storms and communicated with municipal EMDs.
- Disseminated FEMA disaster response process to town staff (select boards, zoning officers, EMDs and town planners),
- Provided municipalities answers on FEMA Public Assistance on document retention, how to document damages and which procurement guidelines to follow,
- Staffed the local Multi-Agency Resource Center (one day),
- Provided outreach for resources such as PPE, water test kits, information on Individual assistance, NRCS Emergency Watershed Program,
- Notified towns about national guard visits and DSA teams.
- Assisted municipalities to maximize their state ERAF scores by helping to complete LEMPs and making sure LHMPs being worked on were submitted before cutoff deadlines.
- Provided guidance on filings for disaster reimbursement, including fire departments and other town services activated for disaster response.
- Supported Barre City and Montpelier identify structures in Special Flood Hazard Area and list historic structures for substantial damage assessment tasks.
- Collected damages on town roads and submitted road condition reports to VTrans District 6
- Supported towns in emailing guidance and follow-up on debris removal questions,
- Queried sources for available assistance for severely damaged municipal fire station in the Town of Woodbury,
- Organized meeting on floodplain buyout and elevation programs for Barre City and Montpelier,
- Tracked down information for towns on driveway repair eligibility under FEMA Individual assistance.
- Attended Plainfield Flood Forum at town request,
- Attended meeting on status of dams within region and which historical dams were lost or damaged during event.
- Provided administrative services for two municipalities to participate in the Emergency Watershed Protection to protect public assets from immediate risk of erosion.

### **Flood Mitigation Planning**

- Following the July 2023 flooding, the CVRPC Board of Commissioners developed regional flood mitigation and planning priorities for the region.

### **RIVER Program:**

- Participated in meetings with Barre City, Montpelier, and Berlin municipal officials; engineering consultants from SLR; and members of other Vermont RPCs to identify and implement flood mitigation projects using FEMA and State of Vermont funding.

### **Other Local Support:**

- Staff met with state and federal representatives to discuss the response to the July 2023 flood and how to better prepare and plan for future flooding events.

## **GRANT WRITING**

Supported Plainfield in applying for project management funding for their Hazard Mitigation Grant to FEMA to rebuild the Brook Road bridge to address regular flooding at this location. Supported Calais in grant administration for the Kent Hill Road culvert redesign scoping study. Prepared Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant application for Stormwater Master Plan for Waterbury. Assisted Middlesex and Marshfield with the administration of the Natural Resources Conservation Service Emergency Watershed Protection Program funding. Assisted Woodbury Planning Commission Chair with Hazard Mitigation Grant Program pre-application to address flooding in the Village from Buck Lake Brook.

- Helped municipalities get access to the FEMA Grants Portal due to staff changeover and loss of access,
- Berlin: area map to support Agency of Natural Resources Recreational Trail Program grant application
- Montpelier: neighborhood district boundaries; area map to support RAISE grant application; Capital Fire Mutual Assistance map
- Managed RAISE Transit Oriented Development planning grant for Northfield, Berlin, and Barre to plan for walkable communities that fully leverage the benefits of transit to support new development.
- Prepared Moretown Municipal Planning Grant application and submitted letter of support for Village Wastewater feasibility study, affordable housing opportunities, and flood resiliency work.
- Served as contact for VT Urban and Community Forest Community Tree Planting Grant for municipal applicants. Provided outreach and education materials to Conservation Commissions, Planning Commission Chairs, and Selectboard Chairs.
- Assisted municipalities in Bylaw Modernization Grant application process.
- Assisted the Town of Barre and the Town of Berlin with a Northern Borders Regional Commission Catalyst Program application for a housing development and to expand a water infrastructure to support growth of a New Town Center. Assisted the expansion of a childcare center in Waitsfield (Neck of the Woods) as the Local Development District (LDD)
- Assisted municipalities with Municipal Planning Grant application process and grant administration.
- Assisted three municipalities with transportation related grant applications.
- Provided MPM support to Orange for a Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside grant for a village sidewalk scoping study.

## **MAPPING (GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM SERVICES)**

RPCs provide municipalities, state agencies and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects.

- Produced custom maps and / or datasets:
  - Barre City: voting district dataset
  - Barre Town: historic district boundaries dataset
  - Calais: disaster recovery map
  - East Montpelier: map series depicting zoning, water resources, conserved and public land, and land registered with the Use Value and Appraisal Program
  - Marshfield: map of trails in the forest behind the Twinfield Union School
  - Moretown: web map to assist with Town Plan updates and continued exploration for wastewater disposal opportunities; area maps (2) to support grant application to fund culvert upgrades.
  - Orange: Town Forest trail network dataset and map
- Produced the following (print) maps:
  - Bridge & Culvert Inventory: Waitsfield
  - Downtown Designation: Montpelier
  - Growth Center: map series depicting growth center boundary, housing, subdivisions and economic development.
  - Local Hazard Mitigation Planning: Barre City, Cabot
  - Village Center Designation: Barre Town, Woodbury (draft)
- Updated zoning data and / or maps for: Barre Town, Cabot, Montpelier, Northfield (ongoing), Waitsfield, Waterbury (ongoing)
- Provided data to municipal consultants: Montpelier, Williamstown
- Statewide coordination:
  - Participated in the development of standards for parcel and zoning data.
  - Coordinated and hosted Regional Planning Commission annual GIS meeting.
  - Participated in LIDAR and aerial imagery acquisition steering committee.

## ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

RPCs integrate energy planning with emergency management, land use, transportation, and natural resources efforts. Staff worked with municipalities, including supporting 18 municipal energy committees and coordinators, supporting strategic planning, technical analyses, project development and implementation, community engagement and event planning, recruitment, etc. (see below). RPCs work closely with local, regional, and statewide partners to rapidly update and develop tools, resources, and programs to help municipalities take advantage of evolving funding landscapes and meet longstanding physical and social infrastructure needs and goals to reduce energy burden, emissions, and promote community-scale energy equity and resilience. RPCs participate in Section 248 proceedings and support comprehensive planning at the local, regional, and state levels to inform permitting process as well as towards GHG emissions, energy equity, reliability, and resilience goals.

**Enhanced Energy Plans & Certifications:** CVRPC conducted a comprehensive update of the regional Enhanced Energy Plan and Energy Element and assisted communities with enhanced energy planning including:

- In coordination with the Public Service Department, other RPCs, and partners, including VELCO, Capstone, and Distribution Utilities- updated Municipal Consumption Tool, LEAP targets disaggregation, Generations Scenario Tool, regional energy maps, and plan language to 2022 standards and to align with LEAP Pathways update, Climate Action Plan, updated Comprehensive Energy Plan, and state policies.
- Met with town leadership, staff, and working groups to introduce Act 174 standards and updates and integration of enhanced energy planning into broad town plan and planning (Worcester, Marshfield, Duxbury, Washington, Williamstown, Warren, Moretown, Woodbury, Barre Town, and Calais).
- Developed updated municipal breakout target and analyses and local maps (constraints and preferred sites) for East Montpelier and Worcester, as well as templates for all towns.
- Established municipal baseline estimates for existing generation, weatherization and fuel switching project counts, and energy use across thermal, electric, and transportation sectors.
- Facilitated working group meetings and enhanced energy plan development (Worcester and municipal guide creation)

**Training & Education:** Increased energy communications with municipalities via Energy e-Digest and listserv and weekly announcements in addition to targeted outreach. Topical digests included: EV&EVSE funding and programs updates, MERP, Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program Survey and GHG emissions reduction planning strategies, etc. Results include the development of municipal projects (see next section)

- Hosted Central Vermont Regional Energy Roundtable (13+towns attended)
- Developed three-part Enhanced Energy Planning trainings; hosted the first on Targets and Analyses
- Developed and hosted ***EmPOWERing Municipal Solar: Building Connections between Communities and Industry Experts*** session at the fall 2023 REV Annual Conference (30+ attendees, 6 developers and VT Bond Bank, and representatives from towns and RPCs)
- Participated in Department of Energy/National Renewable Energy Laboratory Clean Energy to Communities cohorts: *Developing On-Site Clean Energy Procurement Strategies* and *Incorporating Community Voices in Clean Energy Planning & Deployment*
- Participated in the Energy Equity Project Community of Practice cohort: a national collaborative effort to create a standardized framework for energy equity measurement, reporting, and tracking that drives clean energy investment and impact for BIPOC and frontline communities.
  - Adapted just transitions' guiding principles and rubric for regional plan process, engagement, and draft review.
- Created resources on priority project types and planning issues for town events and discussions including planning for GHG emissions reductions, climate resilience for an aging nation, developing community resilience hubs, local energy resilience and reliability (emergency response and clean recovery back-up power), and resilient affordable housing development.

- Tabled at Waterbury LEAP Energy Fair: hosted scavenger hunt of key energy partners for municipalities, discussed municipal projects and general regional and state issues with 75-100 people including town leadership and community members (prepared materials including WindowDresser event fliers, Town Committee/Coordinator and Enhanced Energy Plan status maps, etc.)

### **Municipal Project Development and Support:**

- Supported BGS ACT 172 Municipal Energy Resilience Grant Program development and rollout providing technical assistance, application support, education and outreach, and program coordination with partners and stakeholders:
  - 20 of 23 municipalities applied for and received assessments (49 buildings approved out of 69 applications in our region; 47 assessments completed (2 lost to flooding)),
  - 22 of 23 municipalities applied for and received \$4,000 mini grants (\$88,000 regionally)
  - Provided technical assistance and community visioning support on project development, report review and prioritization, and alternative funding identification to towns; provided recommendations and technical assistance in implementation phase rollout in coordination with other RPCs, BGS, and other program partners.
- Provided technical analyses, coordinated with utility and industry as well as school and public stakeholders on specific fuel-switching and on-site generation and storage projects (Montpelier Energy Action budget (district heat proposal), Montpelier and Roxbury School District Net Zero Working Group, Roxbury solar project, Northfield, Cabot solar and storage project (Wastewater Facility and Recycling Building, Marshfield Village potential solar and storage project, East Montpelier Town Garage project, Barre City, Middlesex, Worcester, Duxbury, and Orange.
- Provided technical analyses and coordinated with utility and industry partners to support EVSE, to support municipal fleet-electrification- ready and resilience garage improvements and vehicle replacement program awareness- ChargeVT, DriveElectric, VT Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC), VT Clean Cities Coalition, VTrans' *Electrify Your Fleet* program and public charging programs; developed EECBG EV template- (Moretown, Warren, Worcester, Plainfield, Calais, Middlesex, Orange, Waterbury, Waitsfield, Montpelier)
- Supported the (re)launch of the Barre Town Energy Committee, Calais Town Energy Committee, and Worcester Energy Working Groups
- Supported two Central Vermont WindowDressers campaigns (Montpelier/Barre City and Mad River Valley/Middlesex) at which >130 volunteers built >350 storm window inserts for households across the region including providing subsidized and free of charge inserts for income eligible households. Facilitated coordination with libraries, additional municipalities, and regional partners (Capstone, Efficiency VT, VDH, etc.) and existing builds including regional meeting and program introductions with Roxbury, Northfield,



Marshfield, Woodbury, Barre Town, Calais, and more ahead of next season; resulting in 3 regional builds supported by 12 towns serving region.

- Participated as core member of the Thermal Networks Working Group (EAN) and developed and launched community toolkit on developing thermal energy networks (TENs). Attended program webinars (development and implementation) including VT WRAP program (integration with existing weatherization initiatives),
- Coordinated and submitted initial application materials on behalf of Washington County Courts to the US Department of Energy (DOE) for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant valued at ~\$76k.

**Program and Policy Implementation and Updates:** Collaborated with other RPCs, regional and state partners on development and implementation of programs towards achieving energy and GHG emissions targets- including but not limited to:

- Provided comments and participated in stakeholder advisory efforts including:
  - Served on the Technical Advisory Stakeholder Advisory Group Renewable Energy Standard Update (PSD),
  - Developed and implemented outreach plan and conducted regional engagement on behalf of the Public Service Department (PSD) for Renewable Energy Standard Update Community Engagement Campaign **Say Watt?** (85+ participants Aldrich Library - Barre, Café - Montpelier, and a virtual discussion)
  - Reviewed and provided feedback on Efficiency VT regional data and reports; EAN annual report and dashboard update; VELCO Long Range Transmission Plan, VT GHG Transportation Policy Analyses work plan.
  - Served on the Vermont Council of Rural Development's Municipal Summit Advisory Committee
  - Appointed to the Vermont Climate Council Just Transitions Sub-Committee and as a liaison to the Cross-Sector Mitigation Sub-Committee (thermal and electric sector working groups) as part of the 2025 VT Climate Action Plan Update.
- Attended training sessions on the Municipal Vulnerability Index and VT Climate Toolkit, developed municipal profile templates and use cases, and municipal trainings (ANR, Climate Office),
- Conducted municipal plan inventory of GHG emission reductions actions (town plans, enhanced energy plans, local hazard mitigation plans, etc). to support the development of Climate Action Office's application to the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Application (ANR)

## **CLEAN WATER (WATERSHED PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT)**

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the EPA required watershed plans. RPCs also work with municipalities to design and implement stormwater mitigation projects and implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions.

**604b:**

- Coordinated with the Winooski River Basin Planner to prioritize work under the 604b program.
- Identified approximately 100 clean water projects that were not included in the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Watershed Projects Database from two stream geomorphic assessments, a river corridor plan and a resiliency initiative. Prepared a batch import file to facilitate the upload of data documentation for the projects in the Watershed Projects Database.
- Assisted Friends of the Winooski River with Watershed Projects Database updates for 14 projects.
- Staff reviewed 23 town plans to assess municipal support for stormwater and water quality improvement projects. Staff also reviewed projects in the Watershed Projects Database to identify opportunities to partner with municipalities for project advancement. Town goals, strategies, and actions that do not have associated proposed projects may offer opportunities for new projects to be championed by municipal and watershed partners.

#### **Clean Water Service Provider Program:**

- **Winooski River Basin Clean Water Service Provider:**
  - Issued Requests for Qualifications for project implementors and engineering / construction contractors. There are currently nine pre-qualified project implementors, nine pre-qualified engineering contractors and one pre-qualified construction contractor. Statements of Qualification are being accepted on a rolling basis.
  - Engaged the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration to ensure record retention is consistent with state guidance.
  - Presented a progress report for the Winooski River Basin and a reflection on challenges and opportunities with Formula Grant Funding at the Clean Water Service Provider Summit.
  - Reviewed Basin Water Quality Council Bylaws, Public Participation, and Outreach and Communication Policies.
  - Technical Assistance:
    - Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission: worked with staff and Town of Huntington representatives to prepare a funding request to support Project Development activities.
    - Friends of the Winooski River: corresponded with staff regarding the seating of an alternate member to the Basin Water Quality Council, procurement requirements, project reporting and grant administration.
    - North Branch Nature Center: corresponded with Program Director regarding potential restoration planting projects.
    - Vermont Land Trust: met with staff to discuss funding for berm-removal project in Marshfield, grant administration, reporting requirements and funding for subsequent project phases.

- Vermont Natural Resources Council: encouraged participation in program with a particular emphasis on the use of Formula Grant Funds for dam removal projects.
- **Basin Water Quality Council:** Organized and hosted seven meetings. Staff reviewed seven project proposals, discussed the proposals with the Basin Planner and prepared a staff memo detailing the proposal scores and offering the Council a funding recommendation. Project proposals are now being accepted on a rolling basis to encourage an increased number of submissions. Identified new municipal and Regional Planning Commission representatives to replace members stepping down from the Council at the end of the fiscal year.
- **Outreach & Communication:** Advertised funding opportunities to all Town Administrators, Selectboards, Planning Commissions and Conservation Commissions operating with the Winooski River Basin. Met with representatives from Huntington and Waterbury to discuss project development and funding under the Formula Grant program. Developed an overview presentation to engage Selectboards, Planning Commissions and Conservation Commissions and promote program participation. Identified ~200 water quality restoration projects in the Department of Environmental Conservation's Watershed Projects Database that may be eligible for Formula Grant Funding. This information was used to create custom maps when visiting a municipality. Presented an overview of the Winooski River Basin Clean Water Service Provider at the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Planner's Advisory Committee meeting and the Green Mountain Water and Environment Association meeting.
- **Department of Environmental Conservation Coordination:** Reviewed and commented on Act 76 draft guidance Chapters 3, 7, 9 and 10. Regularly participated in DEC-organized meetings for Clean Water Service Providers to discuss: project solicitation; grant administration; Formula Grant Funding changes for FY25; project verification, operations and maintenance; water quality restoration funding opportunities; project reporting; capacity development; procurement; funding policy to establish a maximum price per kilogram of phosphorous removal when prioritizing the expenditure of Formula Grant funds; phosphorous accounting; . Met with the Technical Project Manager and Basin Planner for quarterly and annual reviews. Discussed strategies for streamlining proposal requirements for project identification and development opportunities.
- **Training:** Staff completed Department of Environmental Conservation Tier 1 Operations and Maintenance Training.

### **Tactical Basin Planning**

- **2024 Tactical Basin Plan:** Reviewed the draft 2024 Tactical Basin Plan and provided comments to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Basin Planner. Coordinated Basin Planner participation in a Clean Water Advisory Committee meeting and CVRPC Board meeting to discuss the draft 2024 Tactical Basin Plan. Encouraged public participation in the review process through the development and distribution of promotional materials. Prepared a matrix detailing the draft 2024 Tactical Basin Plan's

conformance with the 2016 CVRPC Regional Plan. The CVRPC Board authorized the Executive Director to sign a letter to the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources confirming the 2024 Tactical Basin Plan's conformance with the 2016 CVRPC Regional Plan.

- **Clean Water Advisory Committee:** Organized and hosted six Clean Water Advisory Committee meetings to discuss the draft 2024 Tactical Basin Plan and CVRPC's role in implementing the Plan's strategies, invasive species and riparian buffers, the Department of Environmental Conservation LakeWise Program, dam removal and culvert replacement projects, and workplan priorities of watershed organizations working in the Winooski River Basin.
- **Regional Coordination:** Regularly participated in Vermont Dam Task Force meetings, Department of Environmental Conservation Clean Water Conversations, quarterly meetings with watershed partners, Lake Champlain Sea Grant Research Webinars and Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Clean Water Advisory Committee meetings. Worked with the Basin Planner to: (1) better understand how to use the Functioning Floodplain Initiative tool for identifying potential water quality restoration projects; (2) develop riparian buffer projects on agricultural lands in coordination with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; (3) develop strategic wood addition projects and d) identify opportunities for funding municipal stormwater master plans.
- **Technical Assistance:** Reviewed the Vermont Green Infrastructure toolkit and scored the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Ordinance for Barre City, Montpelier, Waitsfield and Williamstown. Identified Mobile Home Communities in the central Vermont region that are eligible for water quality and stormwater grant funding opportunities. Reviewed Flood Hazard bylaws for Northfield, Plainfield, Warren and Waterbury. Provided stormwater master planning updates to the Williamstown Planning Commission and discussed flood hazard mitigation funding opportunities with the Waterbury Selectboard.

### **Water Quality Restoration Project Development**

- Shared a list of 50 potential projects with watershed partners requesting feedback and status updates to ensure projects included in grant proposal were not being pursued by other organizations. Prepared proposal for Addison County Regional Planning Commission Water Quality Project Development Grant. Received funding to complete project scoping for 15 projects and the further development of the five the most promising projects. Discussed project opportunities with municipal staff in Barre Town, Berlin, Calais, Cabot and East Montpelier.
- Reviewed the Department of Environmental Conservation's Watershed Projects Database to identify project opportunities on Vermont Land Trust properties.

### **FEMA Map & Flood Bylaw Updates**

- Regularly engaged with state agency staff and regional partners through organized meetings and drop-in sessions. Reviewed the Department of Environmental Conservation's 2018 "No Adverse Impact" model bylaws and 2013 Vermont Stormwater Master Planning Guidelines.

- Updated 2023 staff National Flood Insurance Program checklist review. Investigated cases where municipal bylaws were found not to comply with National Flood Insurance Program requirements, and summarized changes necessary to fully comply to prepare for more targeted outreach.
- Distributed outreach materials to all municipalities (and their Boards and Commissions) in the region. Established “office hours” for meetings with municipal staff and community volunteers. The Towns of Duxbury and Waitsfield requested technical assistance with reviewing and updating zoning bylaws and flood hazard regulations.

### **Stormwater Project Design & Implementation**

- **Barre City:** Assisted City staff and project engineer with final design of a project at the Barre City Auditorium. Approval of a state permit is pending.
- **Calais:** Met with the Selectboard to discuss stormwater implementation projects in East Calais. Coordinated with town staff to educate affected property owners on the benefits of the projects. Contracted with project engineer to complete final design, acquire permits and provide construction oversight.
- **Moretown:** Coordinated with town staff and the Selectboard to successfully complete the construction of a gravel wetland and the installation of sand filters and catch basins at the Moretown Elementary School and Town Office complex.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

### **Barre City Infill Study**

CVRPC worked with Barre City and the Barre City Housing Task Force to complete a housing infill analysis for the municipality, identifying municipally owned vacant parcels and privately-owned sub-dividable parcels in the municipality that could support ADUs and new housing development. The RPC developed a replicable methodology that staff are now rolling out for other municipalities interested in identifying possible opportunities for new housing in their established town or village centers.

### **Peer Review:**

Participated in a statewide peer review of RPCs. Staff participated in an interview of two other RPCs before joining their respective Board meetings for observation. CVRPC also invited directors from two other RPCs to interview the executive director on policies, makeup, and services and join a commission meeting.

## **ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING**

The FY24 CVRPC budget was ~ \$3.2 million. Revenue sources included local, state, and federal performance contracts, grants, and local assessments.

Most of the CVRPC’s revenue sources are tied to contracts with scopes of work, guidelines, and/or performance measures. This means CVRPC has limited flexibility in how it can use most of its funding. Funding received through municipal assessments is the exception, which makes this funding stream particularly important. It gives us the greatest latitude to respond to the region’s needs. The grants we receive enable us to work with our towns on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, energy, and natural resources.

Revenue from federal and state grantors requires non-federal matching funds ranging from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant). Municipal assessments and regional planning funds passed through to CVRPC under a performance grant with the Department of Housing and Community Development are used to provide this match.

CVRPC maintained its line of credit in FY24 due to a prevalence of product-based contracts. It maintains a Board-designated reserve fund, and a four-year plan for equipment and software upgrades and replacement.

CVRPC's annual audit will be completed in fall 2024. CVRPC has had no audit findings in recent years. It is considered a 'low risk' grantee by federal agencies. Staffing throughout FY24 included up to nine employees: Executive Director, Senior Planners (2), Planners (6), and an Office Manager. CVRPC supported workforce development through use of three Planning Technicians for transportation and planning services. CVRPC contracts for accounting services.

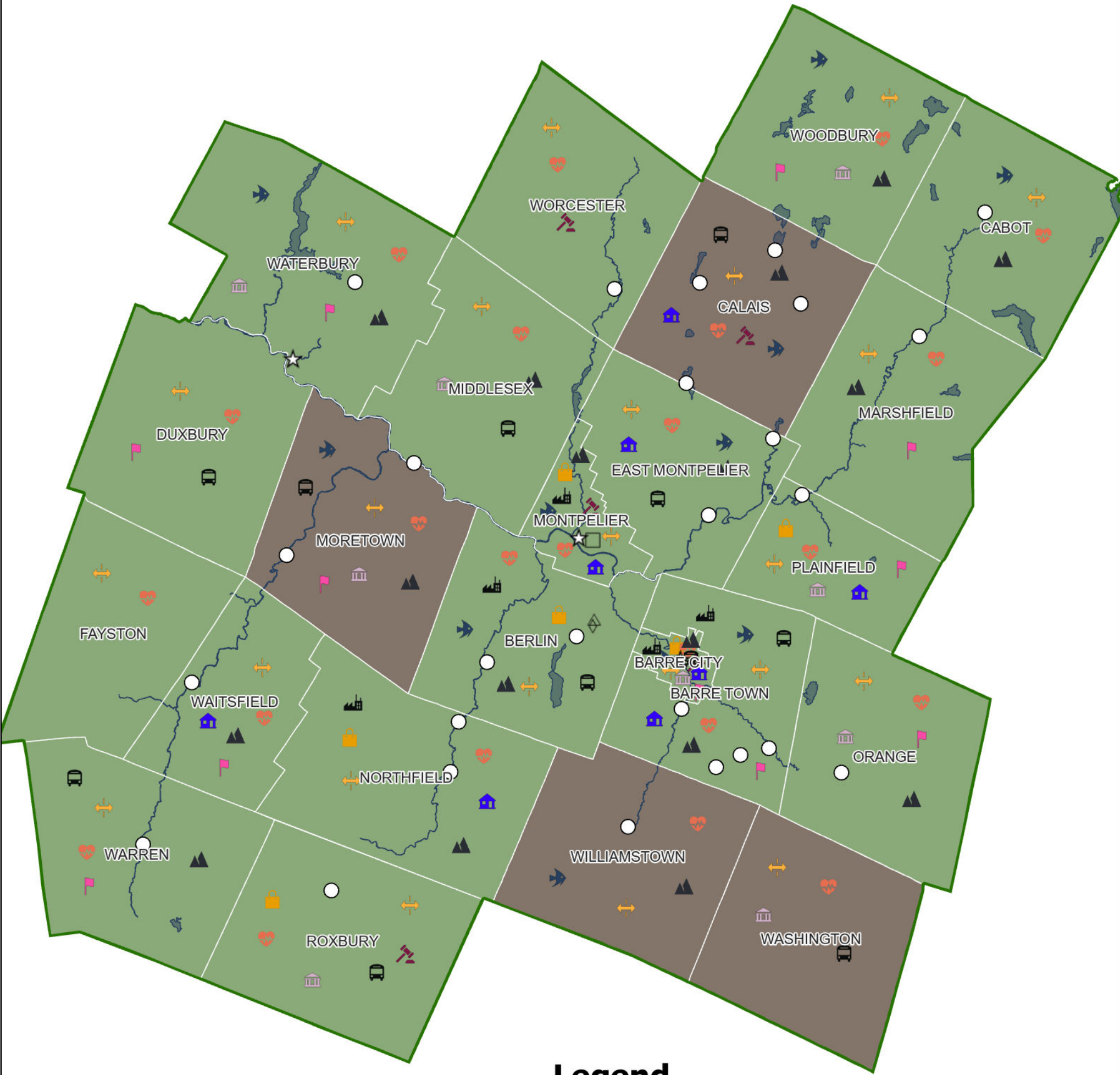
In FY24, CVRPC completed work updating its procurement policy and administrative/financial management policy. These changes were adopted in FY25.

To improve the effectiveness of our IT infrastructure and harden our digital security, CVRPC issued a Request for Proposals for an Information Technology firm to assist with hardware and network upgrades, decommissioning the on-site server and moving data and resources to the cloud, and provide ongoing service support.

## **'AT WORK' MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the CVRPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission at Work FY 2024



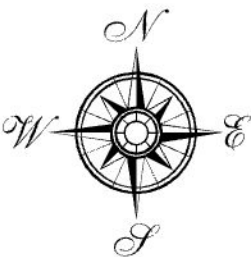
## Legend

- Designation**

  - ☆ Designated Downtown
  - Designated Village
  - Designated Growth Center
  - △ Neighborhood Development Area
- Projects**

  - ◇ New Town Center
  - 🚌 Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
  - ⚡ Energy Planning & Implementation
  - ➡ Clean Water
  - 🚑 Emergency Planning & Response
  - 🚩 Planning and Zoning Assistance
  - ⚙️ Mapping
  - 👛 Economic Development
  - 🏠 Grant Writing
  - ⚖️ Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities
  - 🏠 Housing
  - 🏭 Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**

  - 🟢 Current
  - 🟤 Expired
  - 🟡 No Town Plan





# LAMOILLE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

## FY 2024 Annual Report

Founded in 1966 as the Lamoille County Planning and Development Corporation, the Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) continues to be an important resource to the 15 municipalities of Lamoille County—ten towns and five incorporated villages.

For some years, Lamoille County has been the second fastest growing county in Vermont. The County saw additional growth-especially in the Stowe area- during COVID. Although housing units have been developed in some areas, including Morrisville, there is still a significant housing shortage in the County.

The county's economy is primarily tourism-based—including two major ski resorts—with a growing number of home-grown, nationally-renowned businesses, such as Concept 2, MSI, Butternut Mountain Farm, and The Alchemist. The LCPC's mission is to ensure the protection of the region's environment and conservation of natural resources, and to facilitate sustainable economic development for the benefit of all residents and visitors through a coordinated and cooperative planning process at the local level. Recent flooding reinforces the need for resilient economic development.

Each municipality's legislative body (Selectboard or Trustees) determines who will represent them on the LCPC Board of Directors. Member municipalities of 2,500 residents or greater appoint two directors and municipalities under 2,500 appoint one director to represent that municipality's interests in regional affairs. Additionally, the LCPC has five at-large, elected directors to represent regional interests. Directors serve on committees that make recommendations to the full 24-member Board of Directors. The LCPC has nine highly qualified full-time and part-time staff providing support to the Board and its committees and executing the Commission's multifaceted work program.

The Lamoille County Planning Commission continually updates internal financial processes and procedures to ensure compliance with all federal, state and grant requirements. The LCPC regularly updates both the Personnel and Procurement Policies to be in conformance with all State and Federal statutory changes. The LCPC is audited on an annual basis. The organization continues to receive clean audits, and reviews all policies and practices on an ongoing basis.

The LCPC receives most of its funding through grants, and through performance-based contracts with the state. Town assessments constitute a small, but very important, percentage of our funding.

Revenue from the majority of federal and state grantors requires matching funds, and typically non-federal matching funds. Required match ranges from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant & Northern Vermont Economic Development District).



For the 2024 fiscal year, the LCPC's total projected revenue of over \$2,000,000 was derived from a mix of regional project grant funding, municipal project grant funding, state performance contract funding, non-profit organization grants, federal economic development funding, and a small amount from town assessments. The LCPC completed its first Federal Single Audit for Fiscal Year 2023, given the large amount of Federal funding received that year.

Virtually all the LCPC's revenue sources are tied to contracts with scopes of work, guidelines, and/or performance measures. The commission's performance contract with the state is also necessary to provide matching funds required by grantors. The grants we receive enable us to work with municipalities on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, resiliency, community development, brownfields redevelopment, water quality, energy, housing, and natural resources.

## **PLANNING & ZONING**

### **Municipal**

Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) act as a cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has focused on improving municipal plans and local permitting through education and consultations, bylaw modernization, facilitating housing and economic development, supporting community and infrastructure improvement projects, and assisting with flood recovery and resiliency. Current and clear plans and bylaws are essential for smooth state and local permitting. This work is supported through local and regional planning funds, local contributions, and other grants. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map on the final page of the report. Highlights include:

- The LCPC assisted the Town of Hyde Park in securing a Consortia Municipal Planning Grant. This Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) grant is funding Municipal Plan updates for the Town/Village of Hyde Park, the Town of Cambridge/Cambridge Village, and the Town of Stowe. Municipal Plan updates have a particular focus on flood resiliency and housing issues.
- In FY 24, the LCPC also assisted the Town/Village of Johnson, Town of Eden, and Town of Wolcott with Municipal Plan updates. The Town of Hyde Park is wrapping up a zoning bylaws update funded by the ACCD Bylaws Modernization Grant. This bylaw update is building on goals for a walkable and bikeable North Hyde Park and earlier work undertaken by the town to encourage new housing in its village centers. A hearing on the draft bylaw amendments is anticipated in fall 2024.
- Using a separate funding source, the LCPC is also assisting the Village of Hyde Park in illustrating the intent of bylaws and making them more user friendly.
- The LCPC is developing universal development review templates and a training manual to provide local boards, commissions, volunteers and staff with the resources and information necessary to carry out their statutory duties in an efficient, transparent, and consistent manner.
- The Commission was active in water quality issues including implementing water quality projects and programs to protect water resources, ensuring safe water supplies, enhancing recreational opportunities, and addressing known sources of pollution.

- The LCPC assisted the Town of Elmore with identifying funding/financing sources to relocate their Town Highway Garage, which has reached the end of its useful life. The zoning district for the new garage property required a site larger than strictly necessary for a town garage. The additional acreage provides an opportunity for the Town to explore community recreational uses appropriate for the site. The LCPC provided ideas for potential recreational future programming for the Planning Commission's consideration. The visioning anticipated future opportunities for pedestrian and cycling access to the site. The Town is considering surveying levels of resident interest in program elements.
- Since 2019, the LCPC has been assisting the Town of Wolcott with coordinating a project to address wastewater limitations in the Village Center. In June of 2023, a "Preliminary Engineering Report" (PER) identified an option for a "Septic Tank and Effluent Pump" community system which includes a shared leach field located at the Wolcott Elementary School. The site is particularly important for Wolcott, given its location outside of the floodplain. Since the PER was completed in December 2023, the LCPC has coordinated with the Wolcott Wastewater Committee and School Board to share information about the project and secure buy-in for the role the school fields will play in the system. The LCPC also supported the town Wastewater Committee with public engagement and outreach about the project goals leading up to a townwide bond vote in June 2024. We also worked with the Wastewater Committee, project engineers, and consultants to advance engineering and design, and develop a policy for a future wastewater system ordinance. Last but not least, the LCPC helped secure an additional \$2,040,000 to cover design, engineering, and construction of the system to make this a fully funded project.
- Through the Municipal Technical Assistance program (MTAP), the LCPC has provided staff capacity and expertise to assist with the following municipal projects: Town of Wolcott, Community Wastewater Project, Town of Johnson Light Industrial Park, Village of Johnson Wastewater Treatment Facility Mitigation/Relocation, Village of Johnson Water and Light Garage, Town of Belvidere Town Forest, and Town of Belvidere Community Playground.

## **Regional**

Regional Planning Commissions coordinate 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. The current Lamoille County Regional Plan was adopted in October of 2023. The Regional Plan Committee and the LCPC staff worked on updating the Plan. The process of updating the plan included consultation with the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) committee as well as with the full LCPC board. The LCPC staff and Regional Plan Committee also worked on an update to the Lamoille County Enhanced Energy Plan as an Amendment to the Regional Plan. This Amendment was adopted by the LCPC Board of Directors in July, 2024 to meet the latest Act 174 standards.

The LCPC has updated its Act 250 review process, making the process more transparent, understandable, and accessible to both developers and municipalities. The Commission has engaged in extensive outreach to increase regional understanding of the Commission's role in the Act 250 process. In FY24, the LCPC reviewed two Section 248 applications.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with towns and in strong partnership with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs), to develop comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic growth.

Through programs such as MTAP and grant funding, the LCPC directly supports economic development by providing staff capacity, expertise, and grant writing to municipalities. In FY 24, the LCPC secured funding and provided technical assistance to the Town of Johnson in the development of a light industrial park proposed at the edge of the village. Technical assistance and grant writing also helped advance the Wolcott Community Wastewater System, to support economic development and flood resilience in Wolcott Village Center. Additionally, the LCPC became a Northern Borders Regional Commission Local Development District in FY24 in an effort to enhance municipal grant administration support systems.

Outdoor recreation is also a valuable asset for the region's economy. The LCPC supports municipalities and local recreation and trails committees with bike and pedestrian scoping and improvement projects. We also coordinate with the Agency of Transportation on projects, planning, and program development for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. This 93-mile, four-season, ADA recreational facility is a welcoming and inclusive economic driver in the region.

In FY24, the LCPC continued to work with the newly formed Lamoille FiberNet Communications Union District (LFCUD). The district now represents all ten towns in Lamoille County. A Communications Union District (CUD) is a unique kind of Vermont municipality comprised of two or more towns and established for the purpose of prioritizing access to unserved and underserved addresses to symmetrical, high-speed, and affordable internet service.

The lack of water and wastewater infrastructure remains a major impediment to revitalization and community development in many Village Centers throughout Lamoille County's rural communities. The LCPC continues to work with member municipalities to address these challenges.

- The LCPC is currently working with the Town of Wolcott to investigate wastewater solutions for the Designated Wolcott Village Center with funding through the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. The Town also secured an additional \$2.04 million for implementation of a soil based wastewater system in the Village Center.
- The LCPC is working with the Town of Hyde Park for a similar investigation for wastewater solutions in the North Hyde Park Village Center.
- The LCPC also continues to assist the Village of Jeffersonville with critical upgrades to their municipal water system.
- LCPC provided assistance to the Village of Jeffersonville to receive funding from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to assess alternatives to restore the Village Wastewater

Treatment Plan and mitigate potential future flood damage following the substantial damage to the plant during the July 2023 Flood.

- LCPC assisted the Town of Johnson with stormwater, wastewater, water supply, and transportation infrastructure planning related to a potential industrial park. A bond vote on the industrial park infrastructure is scheduled for September 2024.

The LCPC continues to work closely with the Lamoille Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) to foster development in the region. The Executive Director of each organization serves *ex officio* on the other's board. This level of coordination allows for improved communication, development, and community outreach. The Executive Director of the LCPC and the Director of LEDC serve as co-chairs of the Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD). The District was designated by the Economic Development Administration of the US Department of Commerce and includes six counties in Northern Vermont.

The Commission, along with members of the Smugglers' Notch Partnership, completed another successful summer of operations at the Barnes Camp Visitors' Center. The LCPC, the Green Mountain Club, and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation continue to coordinate outdoor volunteer operations at the Barnes Camp Visitors' Center.

Tractor trailer trucks trying to traverse the turns of Smugglers' Notch remain a perennial challenge. Sign improvements identified in a "Road Safety Audit" have had some success in reducing the total number of truck "stuckages". Some drivers, however, continue to attempt to cross through the Notch. During the 2024 summer season, VTrans conducted a test/demonstration project of temporary "chicanes" at the northern and southern gateways of the Notch. A chicane is a change in the road geometry on Route 108 that mimics the curves in the Notch. This test is a follow up to a scoping study facilitated by the LCPC and VTrans. Results of the study will be used to evaluate if a permanent chicane would be an effective and desirable solution.

Also in the Notch, the LCPC oversaw construction of the first phase of ecological restoration and parking improvements along Route 108 through the Notch. The project includes replanting and closing "bootleg" parking areas along the road shoulder and streambanks with native vegetation appropriate to the Notch's alpine environment, and relocating parking to safer, less environmentally sensitive areas with modern stormwater management. The project will result in a net reduction of impervious surfaces in the Notch, with an associated reduction in sediment and phosphorus entering the sensitive headwaters of local rivers, while maintaining similar amounts of parking available for visitors. The LCPC is actively working with VTrans and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation to secure funding for the second phase of the project.

## **GRANT WRITING**

The LCPC provided help identifying appropriate funding sources, defining project scope, and writing applications for numerous municipalities. Some highlights are included below:

- The LCPC staff is assisting Johnson Village, which was awarded Congressional Discretionary Spending funds to design and construct a new garage facility. The existing building suffers from multiple issues which present challenges to both the staff and the operational efficiency of operating and maintaining public utilities (water, sewer, electric, stormwater, sidewalks). The LCPC also helped coordinate and facilitate a Phase 1 Brownfields investigation at the site, as well as energy efficiency improvements through the Municipal Energy Resilience Program.
- In FY24, the LCPC assisted the Town of Johnson in applying for a Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC) grant. A 2023 NBRC Catalyst Program grant in the amount of \$861,945 was awarded to help the Town fund the development of a light industrial/commercial park outside of the 100-year floodplain along the Lamoille River. This project aims to develop critical infrastructure including an access road, water, wastewater, electric, and telecommunications. Installing this core infrastructure in a safer area will be helpful for Johnson's ability to create local, accessible job opportunities, and be resilient in the face of future climate conditions and extreme weather events.
- The LCPC has been collaborating with the Wolcott Schoolhouse Revitalization Committee on the goal of bringing new life to the Historic Wolcott Schoolhouse. The LCPC staff also helped the Town secure a Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) and issue a Request for Proposals for a Site Feasibility Study funded by the MPG. All of this is an effort to continue moving the Schoolhouse building towards being a focal point and useful facility for the residents of Wolcott and visitors to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. The LCPC has worked with the Schoolhouse Revitalization Committee by managing monthly meetings, collaborating with engineers and architects to develop site plans for the schoolhouse, and identifying potential funding opportunities to restore the schoolhouse. In May 2024 the Schoolhouse Revitalization Committee received approval from the Wolcott Selectboard to apply for the Preservation Trust of Vermont's Trust Initiative which provides funding and guidance to the communities looking to establish a community trust.
- The LCPC assisted in securing Clean Water Service Provider funding for Preliminary Design planning projects in the Lamoille Basin (Floodplain Restoration on a Vermont Studio Center property near the Gihon River in Johnson, Floodplain Restoration/Bridge Replacement of the Gulf Road Bridge in Wolcott). The LCPC submitted a Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) Request for installation, operation, and maintenance of ten stream gages and two precipitation sensors for the mainstem of the Lamoille River and its key tributaries. If funded, the data collected will aid in forecasting, early warning, flood modeling, and future mitigation work.
- The LCPC assisted eleven of our municipalities with hazard mitigation project development and/or Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) Pre-Applications, resulting in thirty-four pre-applications submitted. The LCPC also developed HMGP Pre-Applications to update and enhance Local Hazard Mitigation Plans and associated documents for fourteen of our municipalities as well as the stream gage and precipitation sensor proposal in the event the CDS request is unsuccessful.
- The LCPC assisted the Town of Wolcott with multiple funding requests for construction of the Community Wastewater project. In the Fall of 2023, we assisted with a Community

Recovery and Revitalization Program grant request to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. In the Spring of 2024, the LCPC also helped prepare a Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) request, as well as a Northern Borders Regional Commission Catalyst Program grant request for this project.

- The LCPC assisted the Village of Johnson and Town of Hyde Park with “mini grant” requests through the Municipal Energy Resilience Program.
- LCPC worked in partnership with the other RPCs and Regional Development corporations in the Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD) to secure a half million dollar (\$500,000) grant from the US Economic Development Administration to assist with flood recovery planning efforts in Lamoille County, Franklin/Grand Isle, and Northeast Kingdom Regions. The grant will also support community recovery planning throughout Northern Vermont. The grant will extend the LCPC’s existing hydraulic model of the Lamoille Main Stem into Franklin County and the Northeast Kingdom. The model will assist communities in identifying potential ways to reduce flood risks, as well as safer areas for future economic development.

## **BROWNFIELDS**

The LCPC Brownfields Committee meets bimonthly to review requests for funding to support the assessment of environmental contamination at sites within Lamoille County. With a \$370,200 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the LCPC was able to continue the important work of public outreach, property assessment, and corrective action planning, with the goal of redevelopment.

The LCPC staff facilitates the bi-monthly Brownfields Committee meetings and helps bring site nominations forward for their consideration. One new site in Morrisville was nominated and accepted under the LCPC Brownfields program in the past year. Ongoing site assessments and planning are continuing at two sites in Wolcott, including the Wolcott Town Forest and Gravel Parking Lot. A Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was completed at the Town Forest, and corrective action planning began. Most of the property will be sold and held in a conservation easement, with a small portion of the property intended for redevelopment into an affordable housing site. The Gravel Parking Lot also completed a Phase II ESA to determine the presence of any contamination, in anticipation of sale and redevelopment. Supplemental site investigation is needed before corrective actions can be evaluated. A Phase I ESA was also completed in Morrisville for Denoia's Dry Cleaners. The site moved onto a Phase II ESA. Other ongoing site investigations under the program involve the Johnson Powerhouse, Fred’s Auto Garage in Hyde Park, and as of this fiscal year, the former Pleasant Street Auto in Morrisville. To support these projects, the LCPC staff helps coordinate ongoing communication with consultants, property owners, and other regional partners.

In Jeffersonville, the LCPC assisted the new owner of the Granary building with site planning ideas to enhance this Brownfield property’s appearance and its repurposing as a local food business hub, as well as restoring a segment of a former railroad bed as a bike/ped connection to the adjacent

village. A strong vision of the site's reuse and the positive impact this creates in the broader community set a solid foundation for the project's permitting under BRELLA.

The LCPC is also working with the University of Connecticut (UConn) Technical Assistance for Brownfields program (TAB), offered for free to all grant recipients in EPA Region 1. The UConn TAB program is helping develop a "StoryMap" of the Jeffersonville Granary to help showcase the brownfields process and what a successful redevelopment project looks like. The TAB team is also helping develop a one-pager to be shared with the region's communities about brownfields redevelopment, as well as a site reuse assessment for the Wolcott Gravel Parking Lot.

## HOUSING

Lamoille County's population continues to grow. Towns in Lamoille County are within commuting distance to regional jobs in Montpelier and Chittenden County. How growth occurs impacts housing affordability. New housing for Lamoille's workforce can be constructed on sites that can support new development, but barriers exist to building housing types that match demographics and financial situations and can fit successfully in neighborhoods.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the LCPC began a collaborative effort with the Lamoille Housing Partnership, the Stowe Land Trust, the Lamoille Area Board of Realtors, and the Lamoille Economic Development Corporation to update a Housing Needs Assessment for the County. The report was finalized and distributed in FY24.

The LCPC partnered with the Working Communities Challenge and Housing and Homelessness Coalition to develop a Housing Resources Guide for municipalities, community groups, property owners, and individuals with the goal of supporting diverse housing development, opportunities, and solutions. The Guide will be available on LCPC's website and distributed to municipalities and community groups to use and/or disburse more widely.

The Town of Hyde Park finalized work on a "Bylaw Modernization Grant" from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development. The Lamoille Area Board of Realtors also contributed to this project with a sizeable grant. The LCPC worked with the Town to explore zoning tools to encourage "missing middle" housing options while maintaining the community's unique sense of place. "Missing middle" housing refers to housing that is affordable to working families who earn too much for most subsidized, affordable housing, but are still priced out of most of an area's market rate housing. Missing middle housing often consists of house-scale buildings with 2-4 units that are compatible in scale and form to existing single family homes. As the Town noted in its application, *"Lamoille County is at the highest cost-burdened level at 20% per State housing data. Residents and business owners are faced with the challenge of finding housing at all for workers and young adults."* In recognition of this need, the Lamoille Area Board of Realtors provided supplemental funds for this effort.

The Regional Plan Committee and the LCPC staff updated the Lamoille County Housing chapter as part of the Regional Plan update. This is an area where future Plan Amendments are expected to

reflect Act 47, the state's new housing legislation, and current efforts to update the Vermont Housing Needs Assessment.

The LCPC continued to provide project management and grant administration services to the Town of Johnson and Jenna's Promise related to a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Through the CDBG, Jenna's Promise restored a vacant building on Johnson's Main Street, creating eight units of recovery housing and a community café that creates job training and employment opportunities for people in recovery.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

Through a contract with Vermont Agency of Transportation, each RPC coordinates the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the improvements to Vermont's transportation system, with local communities represented through regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs). The TAC includes representatives from local communities with transportation stakeholders having the opportunity to provide input. 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.

In this reporting period, the Lamoille County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met six times, with an average member participation rate of 58%. Some of this year's TAC activities included Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) review, where municipal representatives were shown the MRGP reporting map and website and instructed on how to enter data once road work has been completed; Equity in Transportation where the importance of having reliable and affordable transportation options are critical to serving at-risk communities; Public Transport Study Presentation on "Micro-Transit". This program allows for at-the-ready drivers to respond and provide rides to appointments, grocery stores, and other needs; Transportation Planning Updates regarding Smugglers' Notch as the first phase of construction was completed for the parking and stormwater project. A project to implement chicanes on either side of Smugglers' Notch was also discussed and implemented during this year.

The Lamoille County Road Foremen Network did not meet during this year. Given the hardships towns have faced due to multiple flooding events and the ongoing coordination between towns, the State, and FEMA we did not schedule a road foreman meeting in FY24. We intend on planning a meeting in the fall of 2024. Although we did not meet formally, at various times the LCPC staff met with road foremen, superintendents, and commissioners individually to offer technical assistance, discuss municipal issues of concern, and act as liaison to VTrans and other state agencies. The LCPC spent many days conducting site visits and coordinating with towns on various grant projects and funding opportunities.

The LCPC also helped organize and facilitate meetings for the regional Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) Committee. We also worked with VTrans and neighboring regions to develop updated trail-wide map content, and roll out the LVRT Ambassador Program and Trail Friendly Business Program.



Outreach and Municipal Assistance requests increased this year compared to the prior year, as needs continued to arise. The LCPC staff served on several Committees and Boards including the Regional Older Adults & Persons with Disabilities (O&D) committee, the Rural Community Transportation's Board of Directors, and the Green Mountain Transit's Board of Commissioners.

Municipalities sought assistance stemming from public complaints about roads. Additionally, as established during the COVID pandemic, the LCPC continued to partner with our regional human services agencies to support and assist with an increased need for services and assistance. The LCPC worked directly with public transportation providers to ensure the needs of flood damaged communities were met.

Outreach and Municipal Assistance provided by the LCPC staff covers a broad array of topics, including quarterly O&D meetings, human services transportation meetings, quarterly water quality and fish habitat partners meetings, seasonal site visits with towns, multiple meetings with towns about bike/ped grant projects, TAC meetings, erosion mitigation planning, regularly recurring Smugglers' Notch & Barnes Camp meetings, and Green Mountain Byway Committee meetings.

The LCPC provides ongoing assistance to Eden and Belvidere for transportation project planning and management including project management services for Better Roads, Grant in Aid, Building Resilient Infrastructure, and Communities Grant projects as well as project prioritization and grant writing.

Data collection activities by the LCPC for the Vermont Agency of Transportation included 21 tube traffic counts, 1 turning movement count, 1 manual and 1 automatic bike/ped count, 4 park and ride counts, and annual town complete streets reporting. The LCPC takes requests for these counts year-round, and prioritizes them during the field season. We continue to attempt to fill data gaps within our traffic count data.

The LCPC continued to participate in the Vermont Better Roads Program, which works to promote use of Best Management Practices for erosion control and maintenance techniques along municipal roads that preserve infrastructure while protecting Vermont's lakes and streams.

All 10 towns in the County are participating in Grant in Aid this year and multiple towns request aid annually on transportation related grants.

The LCPC continues to assist towns in recovering from the 2023 July Flooding. LCPC assists with reporting damage from flood events to the state in an effort to help the towns receive recovery funding. This process included making calls to every town and reporting their road and infrastructure damage to the state.

The LCPC participated in the Green Mountain Byway Committee in partnership with Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). The expanded Byway is now a 71-mile loop from

Waterbury to Stowe, Morristown, Hyde Park, Johnson, and Cambridge, including the Smugglers' Notch Scenic Highway which takes you back to Stowe.

The TPI workplan provides several task categories which support municipal planning and technical assistance, and over 50% of the LCPC's total TPI budget supports municipal technical assistance. Example projects that fall under municipal technical assistance are:

- Water Quality: provided coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and facilitated group and individual discussions with municipal staff, boards, and other partners in all 10 towns.
- Compliance with the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP): continued providing technical services and guidance to towns to comply with the MRGP via Better Roads and Grant In Aid funding. This also includes data collection and entry on state databases to ensure each town is shown in compliance.
- Planning Studies: Prepared for implementation of parking and stormwater improvements for the Smugglers' Notch State Park area in partnership with Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, and Vermont Agency of Transportation; participated in VT108/VT100 Corridor and Congestion Planning; participated in Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) funded planning for a structure in Belvidere; Project management for Johnson Scribner Bridge, Cambridge Greenway Trail Extension, Johnson Sidewalk Extension, and Belvidere Scoping for multiple culvert replacements.
- LCPC also worked with communities to identify vulnerable transportation infrastructure that was damaged during the three recent major flood events that devastated the region. For example, LCPC assisted the Town of Wolcott in identifying potential alternatives to reduce future flood impacts to the Flat Iron Road – one of only two connections between the Wolcott Fire Station and Highway Garage and areas of Town located north of the Lamoille River.
- The Town of Elmore has developed a new and 100% "green" town garage on an 18 acre publicly owned property just outside the village. LCPC staff have been assisting the Town of Elmore in developing a vision for the future recreational use of the property. The town intends a program of multiple outdoor activities – walking trails, sports fields, garden space, local events, and other communal uses – to bring residents together socially and make a healthy lifestyle available to everyone in Elmore. The LCPC assisted the Elmore Planning Commission with a survey to send to Elmore residents to gather a broad range of residents' opinions on how this property should be used in the near term and in the future.
- The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) runs through the village of Wolcott. Parking facilities to access the popular trail are insufficient and options to address this are limited because the village experiences severe flooding. The LCPC assisted the Town in working with engineers to create additional parking that complies with State Floodplain and River Corridor permitting and local zoning. An analysis of existing conditions, parking needs, and permitting implications determined a minor .2 acre expansion of the parking lot was possible. This expansion would accommodate 6-8 trucks/trailers, making the trail more available to snowmobilers, kayakers, and horseback riders. To show how the property could be used year-round by LVRT users, kayakers, and for Town events in the village, the LCPC prepared a conceptual plan for welcoming visitors using signage, a shaded but rustic picnic area, and

wetland appropriate native vegetation that could be planted between the parking lot and the floodplain to curb establishment of Japanese knotweed and other invasives.

The LCPC is committed to coordinate with each municipality within the county to ensure their needs are heard and provided for. We strive to continue to facilitate productive relationships between each municipality and the state to ensure funding opportunities are pursued and projects are completed to a high standard.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

Regional Planning Commissions play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, Vermont Agency of Transportation, and the Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the Regional Emergency Management Committees, and coordination among responders and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPCs also help update floodplain bylaws and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans, and assist as needed in special circumstances like the July 2023 flood and other declared disasters.

Notable projects in FY24 included:

- The LCPC was awarded Disaster Recovery Technical Assistance funds from USDA Rural Development to provide direct technical assistance to further develop projects that show high potential to protect important community facilities in Lamoille County that are vulnerable to flooding. The grant performance period ended in October 2023. The grant enabled numerous projects that are important to Lamoille County's resiliency and long-term recovery following the major flooding in 2023 and 2024. These include both ecologically based mitigation efforts such as floodplain restoration projects in Wolcott, Johnson, and Cambridge, and economic recovery such as the redevelopment of the Granary in Jeffersonville by a local, agricultural based business.
- Staff worked with Eden to update their Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Managed a Flood Resilient Communities Fund (FRCF) grant for acquisition and floodplain restoration at the "Holmes Meadow" in the Village of Johnson. Flood modeling completed in 2019 identified the potential for floodplain restoration in this location to reduce damage from flooding and ice jams in Johnson Village.
- Managed a Flood Resilient Communities Fund (FRCF) grant for acquisition of a floodplain property in the Town of Cambridge.
- Nine of ten (90%) municipalities in the region currently have an updated local emergency management plan (LEMP).
- The LCPC continued to provide administrative and technical assistance to the Lamoille REMC (Regional Emergency Management Committee) to host trainings and emergency preparedness discussions. In FY24, the REMC hosted speakers that presented on emergency management topics such as fire safety and post-flood response.

- Staff coordinated with Vermont Forest and Parks and FEMA to implement the plan derived from the Smugglers' Notch Drainage Study that identified alternatives to mitigate flood and erosion damage to Route 108.
- Staff worked with the Town of Hyde Park to hire a consultant to study possible alternatives at the Garfield Road Culvert and Whitcomb Island Bridge. The consultant proposed alternatives for the selectboard to choose between. The LCPC will continue working with Hyde Park to pursue additional funding for final design and construction of both sites.
- Managed a grant where the funds were subcontracted to all RPCs in Vermont to assist municipalities with updating their flood hazard bylaws in preparation for the update of FEMA Floodplain Maps. The LCPC prioritized all their municipalities in order to assist the towns and villages that need the most help.
- The LCPC continues to work with communities along the Lamoille River Main Stem to develop a hydraulic model of the Lamoille River Main Stem. The model is designed to show floodwater levels during various-sized storm events. The model can also show the impacts of structures, such as roads and bridges, on upstream and downstream flood levels. The LCPC, in partnership with other RPCs and RDCs in the Northern Vermont Economic Development District, received a grant from the US Economic Development Administration (USEDA) to expand the model into Franklin County and the Northeast Kingdom, and to include key tributaries. The model is a public document available to any community. Every time the model is used for a community project, additional data is added, making it more accurate and valuable for the Region.
- The LCPC has provided direct assistance to municipalities still in recovery from flooding by providing staff capacity and expertise on a wide variety of projects. Specifically, the LCPC has been assisting: the Village of Johnson with the Wastewater Treatment Facility Alternatives Analysis to determine whether the facility should be relocated or mitigated on-site; the Town of Wolcott with redevelopment of Flat Iron Road, an important emergency route; Alternatives for sites of frequent erosion on North Wolcott Road; additional mitigation efforts on Route 15 in Jeffersonville; and floodplain restoration efforts in several communities along the Main Stem.
- In FY24, the LCPC coordinated the development of the new Lamoille Flood Resiliency and Hazard Mitigation Working Group. The working group, comprised of municipal representatives from the region, began meeting monthly in March to discuss regional coordination. The group developed a list of priority mitigation projects, resulting in thirty-four HMGP pre-applications. Another important aspect of the group has been sharing experiences, challenges, gaps, and successes following repeated flood events in the past several years. This has resulted in increased emergency communications between upstream and downstream communities, better preparedness, and earlier warning. The group has also been exploring the idea of regional response and the expansion of mutual aid agreements.
- The Lamoille Area Recovery Network (LeARN), a long-term recovery group (LTRG), was formed to assist flood survivors. The LCPC has formed a strong partnership with LeARN. This partnership has resulted in increased regional coordination, an increased understanding of on-the-ground impacts, better human services, important linkages

between LeARN and Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), direct assistance to individuals and households, buyout and elevation workshops, and a comprehensive understanding of response and recovery gaps, needs, and how/where the region can improve. The LCPC is also working with LeARN to incorporate long-term recovery groups into regional, town, and local emergency management plans.

## **JULY AND DECEMBER 2023 FLOODING**

The July 2023 flood had devastating impacts on communities along the Lamoille River. Neighborhoods in Wolcott, Johnson, Jeffersonville, and Cambridge Village flooded. The flood had disproportionate impact on neighborhoods with high percentages of rental housing, older housing stock, mobile homes, and mobile home park communities. Critical facilities such as the Wolcott Town Garage and Fire Station and Johnson Wastewater Treatment Plant were impacted by the flood. The flood forced the closure of the Sterling Market in Johnson and the temporary closure of Kinneys in Cambridge Village.

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail , which was scheduled for a grand opening the weekend after the flood, suffered severe damage, including several bridge washouts. Although the trail remains closed in some locations it is fully open in Lamoille County.

Another major flood of the Lamoille River occurred again in December 2023 and then in July 2024, on the anniversary of the July 2023 storm. Three of the five largest Lamoille River floods in history have occurred in the recent twelve month period.

As the flood waters receded and communities shifted from response to cleanup, it became clear that recovery will take years, and that rethinking, planning, and priorities will be needed.

- The LCPC Staff provided ongoing support to road crews to see if they needed help getting technical assistance from VTrans or VEM.
- Provided guidance to Towns to document their damages via the VEM Local Liaison network.
- Participated in discussions between communities and Rural Community Transportation (RCT) to distribute flyers and work with human service partners in publicizing new emergency bus service between Johnson and Morrisville because Johnson's grocery store was destroyed in the flood.
- Attended 2 VEM Applicant Briefings, including discussing Lamoille County needs with state and federal officials in person, including but not limited to the Wastewater Plant in Johnson and housing needs in Cambridge, Johnson, and Wolcott.
- Distributed VTrans and VEM announcements about Public Assistance sign-up protocols for assistance.
- Facilitated site visits with VTrans District 6 staff to Flat Iron Road and other damaged locations in Wolcott.
- Organized site walks in Wolcott, Johnson, Jeffersonville, and Cambridge Village with professional civil engineers and local leaders to review and gather information about flood damage in preparation for planning repairs and future mitigation.

- Helped to coordinate a regionwide tour with representatives of State Agencies and non-profit organizations.
- Coordinated requests for Grant In Aid time extensions for 50% of Lamoille County towns with significant damage and disruptions to planned project schedules.
- Coordinated requests for municipal assistance from the LCPC staff with FEMA filing and administration.
- Began organizing the Lamoille Flood Resiliency and Hazard Mitigation Working Group to improve coordination of recovery and resiliency efforts and identify mitigation efforts with crosstown benefits.

## **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 resource planning, and 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.

In FY24, in accordance with Act 172, the LCPC continued working with the Department of Buildings and General Services to support the administration of the Municipal Energy Resilience Grant Program (MERP). The LCPC staff reached out to municipalities across the region and educated them about opportunities to explore and fund energy efficiency improvements in municipally owned buildings. The LCPC staff provided technical assistance to participating municipalities, and helped gather utility data and submit requests for free energy assessments of municipally-owned buildings in Belvidere, the Town of Cambridge, Eden, Elmore, the Town and Village of Hyde Park, the Town and Village of Johnson, Morristown, Stowe, Waterville, and Wolcott. Building assessments were completed for all towns except Cambridge and Elmore in FY24. As building assessment reports were made available, the LCPC staff met with town officials, staff, and committees to review the outcomes of the reports and help prioritize projects.

The LCPC also helped the Villages of Johnson and Hyde Park administer their \$4,000 “mini grant” funding awarded under MERP.

In FY24, the LCPC amended the Lamoille County Regional Plan to include an updated Energy Chapter in accordance with Act 174 standards. The LCPC also assisted the Town of Johnson in updating their Enhanced Energy Plan as a part of the Town Plan update.

The LCPC also continues to provide guidance and assistance to Stowe Electric in relation to the Department’s efforts to restore hydroelectric power generation at a former mill in Moscow. The historic Moscow Mills Dam in Stowe is being modernized and restored to generate renewable energy. Federal funding investment in the site and facilities will help reduce local flood risk and create opportunities to preserve and interpret part of Vermont’s history and for safe public recreation access to the Little River. UVM students initiated a site concept to stabilize and restore streambanks, reduce flood risk, and provide public access. The LCPC proposed options that built

on their work and expands potential visitor use of the site. The LCPC proposed a public overlook built on a small utility owned property across the river that offers spectacular views of the dam. This area could be developed as a picnic area with bike repair station; locations for public access to the site from Moscow Road whose development would support traffic calming in the Village of Moscow; ideas to convey dam history and change over time at the property; and more detail on a portage route through the site.

In FY 24, the LCPC assisted the Vermont Public Service Department in providing outreach and hosting listening sessions to provide input on Vermont's Electricity policies and programs. Outreach was conducted under a subgrant agreement with the Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC). The LCPC conducted two hybrid listening sessions. One was hosted during the Lamoille County Regional Plan and Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) meeting, and the second session was in collaboration with the Town of Stowe Energy Committee. Twenty-six people attended both the hybrid events, and seven responded to the online survey created for folks who could not attend an event. The following list includes key takeaways from the events and surveys.

- Affordability of electricity and renewable energy is a common theme and concern. This includes the ability to pay electric bills and structural upgrades to residential infrastructure needed to accommodate technology advancements (e.g., upgrading electrical panels).
- Grid capacity is also a common concern. The ability for Vermont's electric grid to accommodate increased generation and electrification of thermal and transportation technologies needs to be addressed.
- Conversations about generation should be paired with energy efficiency, conservation, and battery storage to help offset loads on the grid.
- Carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions should be factored in when considering where Vermont gets its electricity.
- A mix of small-scale generation sources should be included in Vermont's electricity generation profile. Primary sources should be solar, rooftop solar, and micro-hydro. Consideration should be given to new small-scale nuclear technology (e.g., sand technology).
- Educational opportunities are important to help increase understanding and awareness.

## **CLEAN WATER**

The Lamoille County Planning Commission works with the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to assist with completion of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) required Tactical Basin Plans and works toward phosphorus reduction goals outlined in the Lake Champlain Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Plan. The LCPC works closely with ANR and municipalities to assess and implement water quality projects. The LCPC also works with municipalities to implement River Corridor Plans and priorities through local watershed planning, to develop regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions.

- As part of the Clean Water Initiative, the LCPC conducted outreach on updates to water quality standards, river corridor planning, storm water management, and flood resiliency.

The LCPC has engaged with ANR regarding changes to River Corridor policies and related statewide incentive programs.

- The LCPC assisted with municipal outreach regarding the 3 Acre Rule and General Stormwater Permit, and new rebate programs/funding opportunities for 3 Acre Rule sites.
- The LCPC continues to engage with other RPCs and Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) regarding the framework and operations of Clean Water Service Providers (CWSP). The LCPC assisted with outreach to municipalities in Lamoille County regarding the opportunity to serve as a representative on the Lamoille and Winooski Basin Water Quality Councils that will play a key role in prioritizing water quality projects for CWSP funding in these Basins. The LCPC actively participates in the Lamoille Basin Water Quality Council.
- The LCPC conducted outreach to Lamoille County municipalities regarding the update of the Winooski River Tactical Basin Plan. The LCPC participated in Basin Plan Coordination Meetings and conducted outreach to the Lamoille Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC), the LCPC Board of Directors, and municipalities in Lamoille County in the Winooski watershed regarding the update of the Winooski River Tactical Basin Plan. The LCPC provided comments on the draft Winooski River Tactical Basin Plan.
- The LCPC utilized the LCPC's hydrological model to further evaluate flood mitigation options in Johnson, Cambridge, and Wolcott – including options for recovery from the July 2023 flood.
- The LCPC is assisting in managing three Clean Water Service Provider funded projects for Preliminary Design planning in the Lamoille Basin (Floodplain Restoration on a Vermont Studio Center property near the Gihon River in Johnson, Floodplain Restoration/Bridge Replacement of the Gulf Road Bridge in Wolcott, Potential Dam Removal of the Centerville Brook Dam in Hyde Park).
- LCPC assisted multiple Lamoille County municipalities in submitting Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) Pre Applications for flood mitigation and floodplain restoration projects.
- Staff provided project development and landowner outreach for floodplain restoration projects in the towns of Cambridge, Wolcott, Johnson, and in Jeffersonville Village.
- Staff managed Clean Water Block Grant and Flood Resilient Communities Fund funding for three floodplain restoration projects—one for floodplain restoration design planning at the Dorothy Smith Access Area in Jeffersonville and two in Wolcott along the Lamoille River and Wild Branch, one for a Berm Removal Project at the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Access Area off Elmore Pond Road and one for floodplain restoration along the Wild Branch near the North Wolcott Recreation Field. The LCPC assisted in providing grant management and project coordination for the implementation of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD) Berm Removal project, completed in spring of 2024, and the North Wolcott Recreation Fields Floodplain Restoration Project which began construction in the summer of 2024. This construction project is expected to be completed in the fall of 2024 with some stream buffers follow up plantings scheduled for spring of 2025.

Other efforts include:



- Enhanced flood mitigation efforts along the Wild Branch in Wolcott, by utilizing funding under a 2020 USDA Technical Assistance Grant to evaluate floodplain restoration/erosion control alternatives along North Wolcott Road.
- Managed a Project Development Block Grant to continue development of water quality projects in the Lamoille and Winooski Basins.
- Worked with Stowe to review and revise flood hazard bylaws.
- Assisted the town of Johnson in exploring funding to further the design for replacing the Scribner Bridge and exploring flood mitigation alternatives such as flood chutes to mitigate flooding in downtown Johnson.
- Continued to partner with the Lamoille County Conservation District and participate in the Lamoille County Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Culvert Committee to identify and implement projects that improve aquatic organism passage and restore stream habitat.
- Updated the Watershed project database using funding through the 604B program administered by Rutland Regional Planning Commission.
- Developed water quality projects, including floodplain restoration and stormwater projects in Cambridge, Johnson, and Wolcott under the ACRPC Project Development Block Grant. This grant was instrumental in helping communities move water quality projects to the next phase of development.

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

The Board of the LCPC continues to have a Belonging and Inclusion Committee. This sub-committee of the LCPC Board of Directors meets bi-monthly. The LCPC Board adopted a Declaration of Inclusion which will be included in all policies of the LCPC going forward. The Belonging and Inclusion Committee developed an Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit which will be shared with municipalities as they develop their own policies. This Equity Impact Assessment Tool was utilized when evaluating policies and actions in the 2023 Regional Plan.

The Board is committed to ensuring that the LCPC is fully inclusive in seeking public input, that all policies and practices recognize diversity, and that the Regional Plan reflects the entire community and its future.

In FY24, The Lamoille County Planning Commission finished coordinating a statewide regional planning effort to increase Health Equity in the State of Vermont. The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) awarded Center for Disease Control Federal funds to coordinate the efforts of all 11 Regional Planning Commissions to focus on health equity in municipal planning. This grant extended through the end of May 2024. As the lead Regional Planning Commission, the LCPC coordinated the project with the other ten Regional Planning Commissions to design a [Health Equity Toolkit](#), increase our knowledge of health equity through specific training, and work with the municipalities and diverse populations to create a sustainable approach to improving long term health outcomes for all Vermonters. The Toolkit was finalized and posted on LCPC's website in January of 2023. The Health Equity Toolkit received the Vermont Planners Association Project of the Year Award. The Toolkit also received national recognition from the National Association of Development Organizations.

The toolkit is being used by planners, municipal staff, and health equity partners to include health and equity language and policies in town plans, municipal bylaws, and Regional Plans. The LCPC recently incorporated health equity language into the update of the Lamoille County Regional Plan and is using it while working with Vermont Department of Health and Healthy Lamoille Valley partners to develop a Health and Wellness chapter in the Hyde Park Municipal Plan. The purpose of the toolkit is to help municipal leaders increase their understanding and capacity for including health equity language in municipal plans and to support municipalities in mobilizing local partners to enhance equitable, community-based resources for physical activity and healthy food access. While developing the toolkit, all Regional Planning Commissions participated in health equity training to help prepare for municipal implementation.

The equity focus of this grant designates the following as target populations:

- People of color
- Indigenous people
- Refugees & English language learners
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- People experiencing homelessness
- Vermonters who are Justice involved
- People living with disabilities
- People living in rural communities

Each Regional Planning Commission was granted funds to provide stipends to individuals who help contribute to the planning process and review of documents within these target populations. Together with the support of VDH, the LCPC is working to support the creation and dissemination of health equity planning resources and helping municipalities implement pilot community-based health equity and physical activity projects with the goal of improving at least one of the following:

The natural environment	Aesthetic elements
The built environment	The social environment
Recreational settings	Across-sector partnerships
Physical barriers	Community inclusion efforts

Each Regional Planning Commission worked on a variety of Health Equity community planning projects to implement concepts from the Health Equity Planning Toolkit. The LCPC worked on the following Health equity Projects under this grant:

- Health Equity Audit of Elmore Welcome Packet.
- Survey development to gauge Elmore residents in exploring recreation/community greenspace ideas for the new Town Garage property.
- Supported Wolcott Health Equity TA Pilot Outreach and Community Health Assessment Survey.
- Incorporated Health Equity into the Wolcott Wastewater project outreach materials.

- Incorporated Health Equity into the Regional Plan, and the Johnson, and Hyde Park draft Municipal Plans.

In Fiscal Year 2024, The Executive Director, Deputy Director, and a Board Member of LCPC participated in the Vermont League of Cities and Towns ‘Inclusion and Belonging’ Training.

## **MAPPING**

In addition to enhancing the LCPC’s work, our GIS specialists provide municipalities, state agencies, and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects.

This year the LCPC:

- Worked with multiple towns to inventory and map bike and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Provided mapping services for residents regarding FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) data and their property locations.
- Developed maps for the following:
  - Municipal Plan for Eden
  - Updated road maps for all towns in Lamoille County
  - The Regional Plan update for all sections
  - Cambridge Enhanced Energy Plan update
  - Viewshed analysis Cambridge Roads
  - Johnson Town Plan update
  - FEMA FIRM estimates for towns with large amounts of flood zones.

## **‘AT WORK’ MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the LCPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Lamoille County Planning Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

### Designation

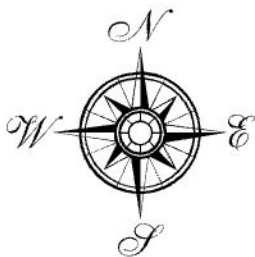
- ☆ Designated Downtown
- Designated Village
- Designated Growth Center
- △ Neighborhood Development Area

### Projects

- ◇ New Town Center
- Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation

- Clean Water
- Emergency Planning & Response
- Planning and Zoning Assistance
- Mapping
- Economic Development
- Grant Writing

- Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities
- Housing
- Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**
- Current
- Expired
- No Town Plan



## **MOUNT ASCUTNEY REGIONAL COMMISSION**

### **FY 2024 Annual Report**

The Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC) is a compact of ten (10) municipalities in east-central Vermont. It was founded in 1966, and is a political subdivision of state government organized under 24 V.S.A. Sub-Chapter 3. The Commission serves the towns of Andover, Baltimore, Cavendish, Chester, Ludlow, Reading, Springfield, Weathersfield, West Windsor and Windsor. The MARC's activities and programs are governed by a ten-person Board of Commissioners; each appointed by the legislative body of their member town, with assistance from up to three "at-large" Commissioners as appointed by the Board of Commissioners. In addition, the Board has the responsibility of hiring staff to carry out the goals and policies of the MARC.

The primary intent of the MARC and its advisory committees has always been to assist with and advocate for the planning and development activities of its member towns. The MARC exists primarily to provide technical assistance to its member towns; assist in mediating inter-jurisdictional planning and development issues that arise between member communities; facilitate discussion and understanding between local and state entities; develop plans, policies, strategies, and procedures for addressing issues that are regional in scope; assist communities with downtown revitalization and community development projects; annually compile, review, and prioritize regional transportation improvement projects for submission to the Agency of Transportation; and to serve as an information resource for member towns and residents.

### **PLANNING & ZONING**

RPCs act as a cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and enhanced consultations (on-site training), bylaw modernization, facilitating transition to Development Review Boards, and implementing goals for economic development and flood resiliency. Current and clear plans and bylaws are essential in smooth state and local permitting. This work is supported through local and regional planning funds, local contributions and other grants. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map; highlights include:

- Provided a range of services to assist with municipal plan updates and amendments for Baltimore, Cavendish, Springfield and Weathersfield.
- Helped planning commissions to prepare zoning bylaw updates in Andover, Chester, Ludlow, Reading, West Windsor and Windsor.
- Reviewed municipal flood hazard bylaws for five (5) towns to gauge compliance with the minimum requirements for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- Assisted with local efforts to implement municipal plans and supporting plans, including in Cavendish, Chester, Ludlow, Reading, Springfield, Weathersfield, West Windsor and Windsor.
- Served as the Interim Zoning Administrator for the Town of Windsor after their ZA retired mid-year.

- Assisted Windsor and Weathersfield with a shared services agreement for their planning and zoning offices.
- Worked with Cavendish on developing a Capital Budget and Program.
- Worked with Ludlow on a housing analysis and action plan.

RPCs coordinate 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.

- The Regional Plan was updated following a multi-year outreach process, and adopted on October 14, 2022.
- Efforts this year to implement the Regional Plan included the following activities:
  - Reviewed all Act 250 applications and Section 248 petitions as each relates to goals and policies in the Regional Plan.
  - Assisting Reading with an ongoing village wastewater feasibility study.
  - Assisted Andover, Chester, Ludlow, Reading and West Windsor to modernize their bylaws to streamline the permitting process for housing that meets the community's needs.
  - Hired a consulting firm to develop a regional housing study that will identify sites within walkable village areas served by municipal infrastructure.

## **BROWNFIELDS**

Environmental site assessments and clean-up allow properties to be sold, developed or re-developed in ways that benefit the local and state economy, increase housing opportunities, create or retain jobs and protect public health and the environment. MARC continues to manage an EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant and a Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund (RLF).

MARC has received a contract with Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development to administer a statewide \$1 million Brownfields Assessment Grant Program for FY24 that was also funded in FY22 and FY23 through the Vermont Legislature. The program will provide assessment funding to RPCs statewide.

MARC also completed a \$3.7 million contract with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation for demolition and cleanup of the former Jones and Lamson site in Springfield. The first phase of the remediation process included targeted demolition and asbestos abatement.

MARC has provided brownfields assistance for 14 properties in 4 towns:

- Springfield: Jones and Lamson, 23-25 and 27-31 Main St., Park Street School, Former Bryant Chucking Grinder, Black River Innovation Campus (formerly Park St. School), Edgar May Foundry, and the Clinton St. Waterline.
- Windsor: 7 Maple Street, 133-139 Main St. (Central & Main), Former Windsor Gas and Light, and the Windsor Railyards.
- Chester: Amsden Hill Rd.

- Thetford: Former UVRLC Property.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. To this end, RPCs work with towns and in strong partnership with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) in several ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic gain.

- Worked on CEDS priority projects as specified in the adopted CEDS.
- Continued to implement the recommendations of the Keys to the Valley housing initiative, including identifying potential sites for new housing development and assisting to establish a housing committee in Chester.
- Assisted the Windham and Windsor Housing Trust with community outreach for a 25-unit housing project in downtown Windsor.
- Engaged diverse organizations through MARC's various health and quality of life projects.
- Served on the Mt Ascutney Hospital food security steering committee and working groups.
- Assisted two towns with municipal health planning. Participated in three regional meetings held in partnership with Regional Planning Commissions and Vermont Public Health. Participated in three Green Peak Alliance and The Collaborative meetings.
- Provided grant administration and project management services to Springfield Regional Development Corporation for a \$1.2M Brownfields Revitalization Funds grant through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and a \$3.0M Community Project Fund (CPF) grant through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to advance cleanup and redevelopment of the Park Street School site for the Black River Innovation Business Incubator and Accelerator Campus project in Springfield, VT.
- Assisted two towns to understand and consider Neighborhood Development Area designation.
- Assisted the Bunker Hill mobile home community in Windsor to apply for funding to make critical improvements to their wastewater system.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

Through contract with the VTrans, RPCs coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the 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.



<b>RPC: Mount Ascutney Regional Commission</b>	
<b>Objective 1 - Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities</b>	
<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
<b>A</b> # of TAC meetings held	4
<b>B</b> # of non-municipal TAC members actively engaged in transportation planning	8
<b>C</b> # of municipalities actively engaged in transportation planning	10
<b>D</b> # of RPC coordination activities with municipalities and VTrans	20
<b>Objective 2 - Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning</b>	
<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
<b>E</b> # of regional transportation plans that are current (within 8 years)	1
<b>F</b> # of Act 250 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation	0
<b>G</b> # of Section 248 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation	0
<b>H</b> # of coordination activities in support of regional public transit providers	10
<b>I</b> # of VTrans committees that involves RPC staff participation	6
<b>J</b> # of regions participating in Project Prioritization	1
<b>Objective 3 - Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities</b>	
<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
<b>K</b> # of municipalities participating in road foreman meetings annually	0
<b>L-1</b> # of municipalities assisted with transportation related grants	10
<b>L-2</b> # of grant programs assisted municipalities with for transportation related grants	7
<b>M</b> % of budget spent on municipal technical assistance	31%
<b>N</b> # of municipal transportation inventories conducted	4
<b>O</b> # of municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition studies completed/undertaken	0
<b>P</b> # of municipalities assisted with transportation element of municipal/town plan	1
<b>Q</b> # of road erosion inventories in support of the MRGP completed using TPI dollars and using other funding sources	1+
<b>Objective 4 - Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans</b>	
<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
<b>R</b> # of data collection activities conducted specifically for VTrans	34
<b>Objective 5 - Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education</b>	
<b>Highlight of innovative, resourceful, and/or collaborative efforts from Region</b>	
Report on unique examples of situations (unplanned events, addressing needs that arise, etc.) that occurred during the prior year in which the RPC conducted outreach or education beyond that of routine task efforts. <b>List examples of innovative transportation planning efforts the RPC engaged in:</b> <i>See Guidance for examples from prior reporting.</i>	
<b>1</b>	Public outreach on Route 5 Corridor Survey to solicit responses.
<b>2</b>	Ongoing maintenance of the Ride Windsor County bike route map, guide and website.
<b>3</b>	Evaluation of typical costs for bike/ped projects when federally-funded vs state-funded.
<b>4</b>	AARP Vermont State Highway Reclassification Project.
5VAPDA FY24 Annual Report	



## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the Local Emergency Planning Committees and coordination among responders and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPC's also help update floodplain bylaws and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans, and assist with declared disaster events.

- Nine municipalities in the region (90%) currently have an updated local emergency plan.
- Ten municipalities in the region (100%) currently have adopted hazard mitigation plans.
- Three towns protect river corridors or have interim protections that allow them a 17.5% ERAF rate.
- Assisted 10 towns with updates to their Local Emergency Management Plans this year.
- Assisted 5 towns with Local Hazard Mitigation Plan updates this year.
- Served as Local Liaison during storm events.
- Provided technical assistance with BRIC and HMGP applications.
- Prepared amendments to the Flood Resilience Chapter of the Springfield Town Plan.
- Assisted West Windsor with flood hazard and river corridor bylaws.
- Assisted Ludlow to prepare flood hazard and river corridor bylaw amendments.
- Conducted outreach to municipalities on the ongoing FEMA special flood hazard map updates.
- Hosted a regional presentation about river corridors.
- Facilitated quarterly Regional Emergency Management Committee meetings.
- Continued to provide guidance to Cavendish, Ludlow and Reading with flood hazard and/or river corridor review under MOUs with each municipality.

## **MAPPING**

In addition to enhancing the RPC work, RPC's provide municipalities, state agencies and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects.

- Highlights of activities:
  - Prepared maps for municipal plans, zoning bylaws and other planning projects.
  - Continued to work with VTrans, RPCs, and a consultant to develop, launch, and provide ongoing support for a revamped version of VTCulverts.
  - Continued to integrate "ArcGIS Field Maps" into regular fieldwork activities.
  - Updated GIS mapping data of municipal water and sewer systems to better inform housing initiatives and other planning efforts.
  - Our consultant developed an online mapping tool to identify sites that are best suited for housing development.

## 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 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.

- Assisted local energy committees and other municipal officials to implement energy plans.
- Participated in the review process for multiple energy projects (Section 248).
- Provided guidance to local officials on Act 174 and enhanced local energy plans.
- Assisted the towns of Cavendish and Weathersfield with local energy planning.
- Assisted VT Buildings and General Services to roll out the Municipal Energy Resilience Program.
- Assisted the VT Department of Public Service with public engagement related to their programs and policies.
- Utilized the LEAP model to develop updated energy plan data and targets.

## CLEAN WATER

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the EPA required watershed 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.

- Supported the efforts of 7 towns to construct road drainage improvements under the Grants-in-Aid program bringing many priority town road segments into compliance with the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) drainage standards.
- Assisted the Town of Springfield with fundraising and provided project management assistance for the removal of the Springfield Reservoir Dam in Weathersfield, removal of the Valley Street dam, and remediation of the Lincoln Street mass slope failure.
- Provided grant writing and project management assistance to the Town of Windsor to construct stormwater improvements at the Mount Ascutney Hospital and Health Center campus to help mitigate erosion in Paradise Park.
- Continued to assist municipalities to better understand flood resiliency and to consider adoption of ANR's model flood hazard and river corridor bylaws.
- Continued to administer a multi-million-dollar block grant program under contract to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to support clean water projects on a state-wide basis.
- Secured roughly \$1.8 million in *Enhancement Development, Design and Implementation Block Grant* funding to support statewide water quality and flood resilience improvements.
- Provided project development support to the Towns of Chester, Reading, Springfield, West Windsor, and Windsor to guide the advancement of select clean water projects.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- MARC received a Safe Streets and Roads for All grant from the Federal Highway Administration, and has established a project steering committee to develop a comprehensive highway safety plan for the region.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

The MARC is funded by performance and project contracts with federal, state and local levels of government, foundation support, and contributions from member municipalities. MARC's FY 2024 budget was \$2,059,607. Core funding provided by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development of \$420,600 leveraged about \$377,000 in additional federal sources.

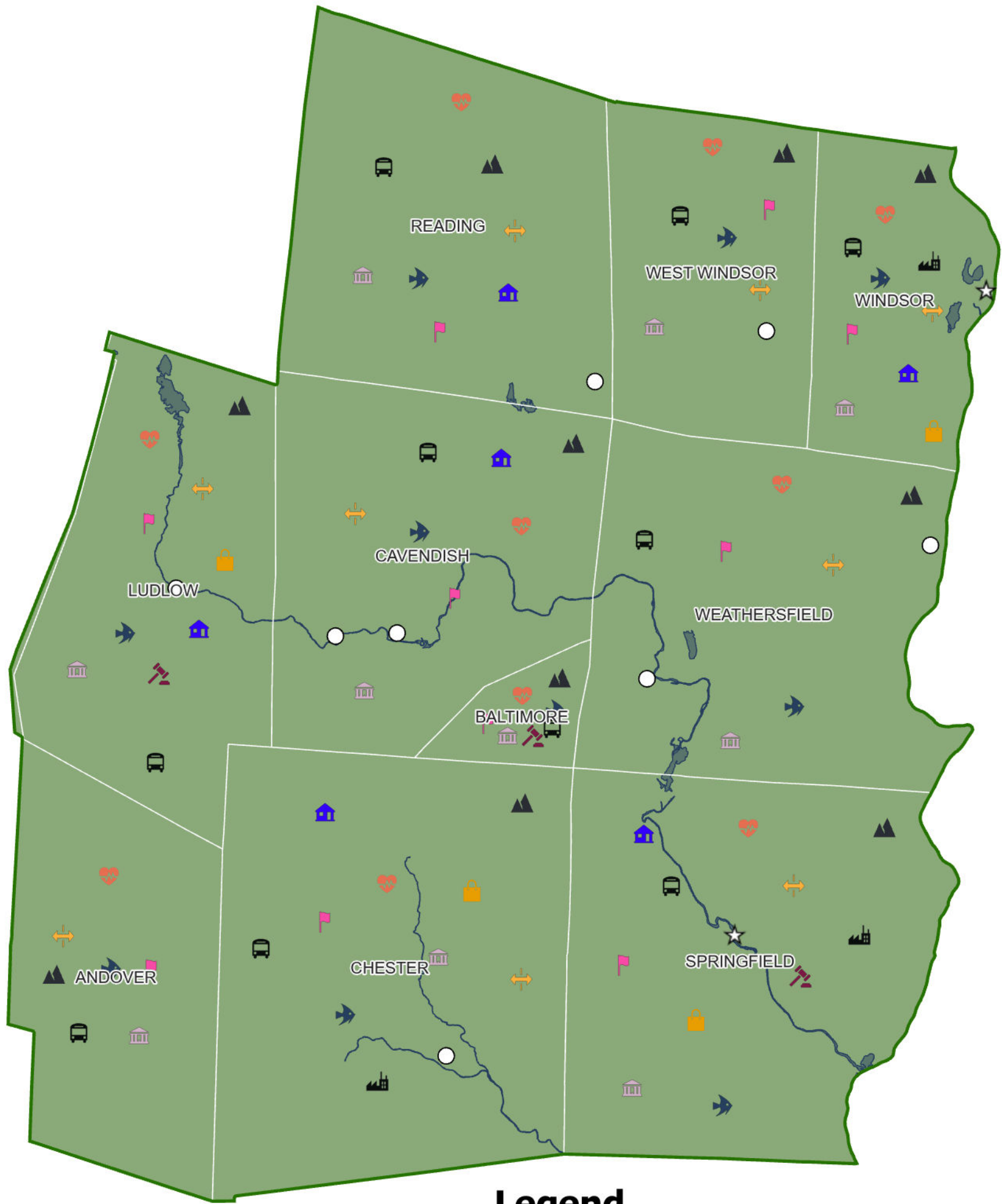
MARC has an annual independent audit conducted by Certified Public Accountants. A single audit was not necessary for the past fiscal year. No significant findings nor material weaknesses have been identified this year.

MARC serves 10 municipalities and operates with a Board of Commissioners that develops and implements policies and oversees a staff of 14.

## **'AT WORK' MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the MARC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Mount Ascutney Regional Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

### Designation

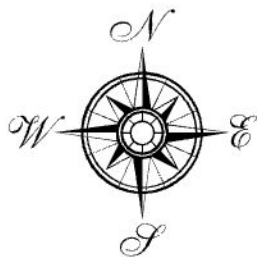
- ☆ Designated Downtown
- Designated Village
- Designated Growth Center
- △ Neighborhood Development Area

### Projects

- ◇ New Town Center
- Bus Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation

- ➡ Clean Water
- 🚑 Emergency Planning & Response
- 🚩 Planning and Zoning Assistance
- ⬆️ Mapping
- 👛 Economic Development
- 🏠 Grant Writing

- 🔨 Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities
- 🏠 Housing
- 🏭 Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**
- 🟢 Current
- 🟡 Expired
- 🟠 No Town Plan



## **NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

### **FY 2024 Annual Report**

The Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) serves the 23 municipalities (19 towns, 3 incorporated villages, and 1 city) located in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties in northwestern Vermont.

Municipalities in the region appoint two representatives to serve on the Board of Commissioners. This board governs the policies and activities of the Commission and elects an Executive Committee and officers to oversee NRPC programs and staff. The Mission of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission is:

- To assist local municipalities, through education, technical assistance, grants and funding; and to aid municipalities in their planning efforts as authorized by Vermont planning laws.
- To serve as a center for information and as a resource to support the region and its municipalities' interests, growth patterns and common goals.
- To provide a forum for the discussion of issues which are regional in nature and/or unique to our area of the state, and to serve as a mediator to resolve conflicts as appropriate. Common sense and a spirit of compromise must be allowed to enter the discussion so that the impacts of development may be mitigated.
- To conduct regional planning programs.

### **PLANNING & ZONING**

RPCs act as a cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and on-site training, bylaw modernization and implementing municipal planning and bylaw requirements for housing and economic development, flood resiliency and forest blocks and habitat connections. Current and clear plans and bylaws are essential in smooth state and local permitting. This work is supported through local and regional planning funds, local contributions, and other grants. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map; highlights include:

- Served as the zoning administrator for Sheldon and North Hero under a municipal services agreement.
- Held workshops that were attended by municipal staff and volunteers from most municipalities. Topics included: Essentials of Land Use Planning, Tips and Tricks in Development Review and Decision Making, Zoning Administrator Roundtable, Open Meeting Law and Complete Streets.
- Completed a consortium bylaw modernization project that resulted in draft bylaw improvements for St. Albans Town, Highgate, Enosburgh/Enosburg Falls, Montgomery and Sheldon aimed at reducing barriers to housing development. So far, the Town of Highgate and the Town of St. Albans have adopted proposed bylaws amendments.
- Provided support to the Town of Highgate on the Village Core property redevelopment, specifically on brownfields assessment and remediation planning, Section 106

compliance and wastewater planning. The redevelopment will include senior housing, a new library and future commercial lots.

- Provided project management support to the Town of South Hero and the Town of Highgate for ARPA and CWSRF funded village wastewater projects.
- Worked on a Town Plan update for the Town of Grand Isle. This project is funded by a Vermont Municipal Planning Grant.
- Continued work on a Town Plan update for the Town of Sheldon.
- Updated and unified zoning and subdivision regulations for the Town of Enosburgh and Village of Enosburg Falls. This project was funded by a Municipal Planning Grant.
- Completed a Town Plan update for the Town of Montgomery focused on natural resources, housing and the two village areas. This project was funded by a Vermont Municipal Planning Grant.
- Completed a Town Plan update for the Town of Alburgh with a focus on Alburgh Village and recreation.
- Initiated a Town Plan update for the Town of Richford focused on streetscape and housing needs in Richford village.
- Completed the Town of Isle La Motte's first ever Town Plan.
- Supported the Town of Isle La Motte secure funding from the Municipal Technical Assistance program to complete an architectural and structural assessments of their shuttered elementary school and old town hall necessary for determining highest and best reuse.
- Supported the Town of Berkshire secure funding from the Municipal Technical Assistance program to complete the necessary engineering designs and secure funding for an accessibility ramp at the Berkshire Town Hall.
- Supported the Town of St. Albans in initiating a Transit Oriented Development Master Plan for the growth areas north and south of St. Albans City, funded by a RAISE grant from the USDOT from Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission.
- Provided technical support to the Town of North Hero for a zoning bylaw update.
- Initiated a zoning bylaw update for the Town of Montgomery focused on addressing short-term rentals and expanding the Village 2 district to provide additional opportunities for housing.
- Assisted the Town of Fairfield with a zoning bylaw update to revise bylaw standards relating to development in rural areas.
- Granted regional approval and confirmation of planning process to the Swanton Town and Village Municipal Plan, Highgate Town Plan and South Hero Town Plan.
- Answered general planning and zoning technical assistance questions for Alburgh, Bakersfield, Berkshire, Enosburgh, Enosburg Falls, Fairfax, Fairfield, Fletcher, Franklin, Georgia, Grand Isle, Highgate, Montgomery, North Hero, Richford, Sheldon, St. Albans City and South Hero.

RPCs coordinate 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.

The Northwest Regional Plan was adopted by the Board of Commissioners in June 2023. NRPC is in the process of adopting an updated enhanced energy plan, with anticipated adoption at the end of October 2024. NRPC will begin updates in FY25 to ensure the housing element complies with the HOME Act and to complete new Future Land Use mapping required by Act 181.

NRPC publishes an online indicator report with [regularly updated online data](#) to show progress on the goals of the regional plan. In FY24 staff worked on an overhaul of the online indicators to align them with the 2023 Regional Plan, which will be published in early FY25.

In FY24 NRPC staff collected data from all 18 municipalities with zoning to create a regional building permit database. The database includes information on the location of new housing units built in the region starting in 2020, which is then georeferenced on an interactive web-based dashboard and map. The data will be updated yearly going forward. The database and web-based dashboard will enable NRPC to track progress toward regional and municipal housing targets, and in FY25 the interactive Regional Housing Dashboard and map will be published.

NRPC reviews state permit applications to ensure proposed projects conform with the regional plan. In FY24, the Project Review Committee reviewed eight Section 248 applications, twelve minor Act 250 applications and one major Act 250 application for conformance with the regional plan. Of the Act 250 applications, the Committee determined that all but one of the projects conformed with the Regional Plan and one project conformed with conditions. The Committee also found one Section 248 project was not in conformance with the Regional Plan.

## **BROWNFIELDS**

NRPC has sought and been awarded over \$5 million 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. NRPC currently has 3 active EPA Brownfields grants, including two Revolving Loan Funds and one assessment grant. During FY24, the following projects were either finished, ongoing or started:

### **Assessment Projects:**

- *6 South River Street, Swanton.* In FY24, NRPC funded a Supplemental Assessment, Evaluation of Corrective Action Alternatives and Archeological Assessments to address Section 106 compliance at the 6 South River Street property owned by the Village of Swanton. The Village bought the dilapidated historic hotel property (hotel now demolished) to facilitate its cleanup and redevelopment.
- *74 Lower Welden Street, St. Albans City.* NRPC continued to fund a Corrective Action Plan for the site of former Green Mount Power cooling ponds. The City of St. Albans is cleaning the site to use for surface stormwater treatment for their downtown.
- *Maquam Bay of Missisquoi of the Abenaki, Swanton.* NRPC funded Phase 2 Assessment, Supplemental Assessments, a Soil Management Plan and Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives at the Abenaki of Missisquoi Headquarters on Grand Avenue in Swanton. The tribe is addressing contamination ahead of a planned renovation to expand use of the facility for a cultural resource center.



- *124 First Street, Former Carroll Concrete, Swanton.* NRPC funded a Phase 2 Assessment and a Supplemental Phase 2 Assessment at this site. The Village of Swanton is addressing contamination with plans to develop a police station.
- *200 Bridge Street, Sheldon.* NRPC approved funds for a Supplemental Assessment and Evaluation of Corrective Action Alternatives. The Sheldon Historical Society is restoring the building to serve as the historical museum and headquarters, in addition to considering public access to the yard areas.
- *Highgate Village Core, Highgate.* NRPC funded a Supplemental Assessment and a Phase 1 Assessment for an adjacent parcel, in addition to approving funding for a Corrective Action Plan at this site. The Town of Highgate is working with Cathedral Square on developing senior housing. The Village Core will also be developed with a new library and have commercial lots for sale.
- *113 Main Street, Richford.* NRPC funded an Evaluation of Corrective Action Alternatives and a Corrective Action Plan at this site. The site will serve as a natural area adjacent to the pocket park and canoe portage.

#### Cleanup Projects:

- *Town of St. Johnsbury, St. Johnsbury Armory, St. Johnsbury, VT.* NRPC granted 162,000 and loaned 162,000 for a total of \$324,000 in cleanup dollars at the St. Johnsbury Armory. The Town of St. Johnsbury is addressing cleanup ahead of renovating the space as a public safety facility.
- *Goldenjunk, LLC., Champlain Transmission, Burlington, VT.* NRPC loaned \$268,640 to Goldenjunk LLC to clean up the former Champlain Transmission site on North Winooski Avenue in Burlington, VT. The owner plans to renovate and use for his Junktiques retail business in addition to a few apartments.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with municipalities and Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) to this end in several ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic gain.

NRPC coordinates the [Northern Vermont Economic Development District \(NVEDD\)](#) in partnership with the three RDCs and RPCs in the six northern counties. An advisory board helped to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that was approved by EDA and is updated [annually](#). NRPC serves as the administrative coordinator for NVEDD. NRPC provides grant administrative support for Northern Borders Regional Commission grantees.

## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Through contract with the VTrans, RPCs coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the 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.

#### **Objective 1**

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

# of TAC meetings held	9
# of non-municipal TAC members actively engaged in transportation planning via the TAC meetings	0
# of municipalities actively engaged in transportation planning	22
# of RPC coordination activities with municipalities and VTrans	4

#### **Objective 2**

##### **Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning**

# of regional transportation plans that are current (within 8 years)	1
# of Act 250 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation	8
# of Section 248 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation	2
# of coordination activities in support of regional public transit providers	4
# of VTrans committees that involves RPC staff participation	1
# of regions participating in Project Prioritization	0

#### **Objective 3**

##### **Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities**

# of municipalities participating in road foreman meetings annually	0
Total # of programs that RPCs municipalities assisted with transportation related grants	6
% of budget spent on municipal technical assistance	45
# of municipal transportation inventories conducted	10
# of municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition studies completed/undertaken	5
# of municipalities assisted with transportation element of municipal/town plan	4
# of road erosion inventories in support of the MRGP completed using TPI dollars and using other funding sources	0

#### **Objective 4**

##### **Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans**

# of data collection activities conducted specifically for VTrans	34
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#### **GRANTS IN AID.**

For FY24 there are 233 municipalities participating in the Best Management Practices program, with 20 municipalities in our region. 11 of those have agreements with NRPC for assistance in the following areas:

- Reviewing existing municipal road erosion inventory maps and data to identify eligible projects.

- Holding pre-construction meeting(s) with the municipal staff to select project location(s), segment start and end points and identify specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) for each project segment.
- Preparing project documentation for municipality to submit to VTrans in order to receive Construction Authorization.
- Assisting with documenting project completion and required reporting in the [Reporter for the Municipal Roads General Permit](#).
- Assisting with preparing and/or reviewing invoicing materials, if needed.

#### **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING HIGHLIGHTS.**

- NRPC secured TPI funding to complete an intersection evaluation at a regionally important, complicated intersection in Franklin (VT120/Middle Rd). As of Town Meeting 2024, the town will pursue some of the low-cost recommendations provided by the consultant.
- NRPC took the administrative lead to work with VTrans and the RPC Rail Trail Council to establish, design, and implement a new, statewide Rail Trail Interactive Map.
- NRPC served as a Municipal Project Manager (MPM) for a local highway culvert replacement project in the Town of Franklin, in addition to several active transportation scoping projects throughout the region.
- NRPC received an \$877,000 grant from the U.S Environmental Protection Agency for an active transportation initiative. The grant will provide critically needed capacity and technical resources to move active transportation plans forward in communities and neighborhoods that have struggled or been left out of traditional grant sources.

#### **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, local Emergency Operations Centers, administrative support to the Regional Emergency Management Committees and coordination among Emergency Management Directors, Emergency Management Coordinators, first responders, planners and stakeholders throughout the State. RPC's also help update floodplain bylaws, write flood resiliency sections of municipal plans and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency management plans and assist as needed in special circumstances such as the July 2023 and July 2024 statewide flood disasters, Covid-19 pandemic, the 2019 Halloween Storm, Tropical Storm Irene and the Lake Champlain Flood in 2011, and other state declared and local disasters.

- Local Emergency Management Plans: Twenty-two municipalities (95%) in the region currently have an updated local emergency management plan.
- Local Hazard Mitigation Plans: Nine municipalities (39%) in the region currently have updated local hazard mitigation plans, and ten (43%) municipalities are in the process of updating their existing plan or creating a new plan. During the last fiscal year, NRPC:
- Regional/County Coordination: Staffed the Grand Isle County Mutual Aid Association, Grand Isle Regional Emergency Management Committee and the Franklin County Regional

Emergency Management Committee, as well as the greater St. Albans Area Incident Management team. The activities include improving capacity to respond to all- hazards incidents, delivering EM related trainings, ensuring that municipalities have hazard mitigation plans in place, and updating Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs).

- State EOC Support: Served as the Local Liaison to municipalities for the Planning Section and Situational Awareness Unit of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) following severe weather events including the December 18-19, 2023, heavy rain event and the July 11, 2024, severe weather event. Duties include establishing direct contact with municipal EMDs /EMCs to assess damages, compiling damage assessments in coordination with Vermont Agency of Transportation and Department of Environmental Conservation and reporting local damages to the Planning Section of the SEOC.
- Special Events: Supported municipalities with public safety and transportation planning for the April 8, 2024, Solar Eclipse Event. The path of totality crossed Grand Isle and Franklin Counties, and large public gatherings were anticipated. Staff attended public safety and event planning meetings by request with North Hero, Grand Isle, Alburgh, St. Albans City, St. Albans Town, Swanton Village and Swanton Town.
- State Committees: Served on the State Training and Exercise Planning Working Group which oversees Vermont's three- year emergency Training and Exercise Plan. Served on the State Individual and Family Assistance Task Force which coordinates immediate and long-term recovery efforts to meet the basic housing and subsistence needs of affected individuals and families following a disaster. The team was activated in response to July 2024 flooding event.
- Grant Support: Provided mitigation grant assistance to municipalities for municipal resiliency efforts including applications for the Flood Resilient Communities Fund, Building Resilient Infrastructure Communities, Flood Mitigation Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

## **MAPPING**

In addition to enhancing the RPC work, RPCs provide municipalities, state agencies and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects.

- Completed town plan & zoning maps for municipalities updating their plans and bylaws. Any new or updated zoning shapefiles are added to the Vermont Open Geodata Portal website yearly (<https://geodata.vermont.gov/>).
- Prepared and updated Village Designation Maps for communities seeking village designation and renewal.
- Completed [E911 Community Maps](#) for all municipalities for use by town officials, emergency responders and others.
- Printed and mailed out any VTrans Highway maps to municipalities that wanted an updated map.
- Updated all the maps for the Northwest Energy Plan.

## **ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION**

A renewed focus on clean, renewable, sustainable and affordable energy presents Vermont with great opportunity and significant challenges. RPCs integrate energy planning with land use, transportation and natural resources efforts, and 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.

- Organized second annual WindowDressers build for the region, providing insulating window inserts to residents including free inserts for low-income residents.
- Supported Swanton and Saint Albans City Energy Committees in their community work.
- Supported the implementation of Municipal Energy Resilience Program in the region.
- Supported the roll out of the Municipal Vulnerability Index including creating profiles for 5 municipalities.
- Finalized regional enhanced energy plan.
- Presented to students on green careers and connecting them to internships and other opportunities to get involved.
- Supported Walk/Bike Saint Albans in their work to increase bike and pedestrian infrastructure in St. Albans.
- Developed application proposal for Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant.

## **CLEAN WATER**

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the EPA-required watershed plans and implementation of the Lake Champlain and Lake Carmi TMDLs. RPCs also work with municipalities to incorporate river corridor assessments and flood mapping in local plans and regulations. This results in better and safer growth management decisions. Some RPCs have additional responsibilities as Clean Water Service Providers (CWSPs) and are charged with pursuing projects that reduce the amount of phosphorus reaching Vermont's waterways and lakes. NRPC is the only RPC to serve as CWSP for two Vermont river basins.

- Evaluated floodplain and river corridor bylaw amendments for compliance with FEMA standards as part of statewide floodplain mapping update. Funded by Vermont DEC via the Lamoille County Planning Commission.
- Assisted the state's Basin Planner with watershed planning activities in the Northern Lake Champlain, Missisquoi Bay, and Lamoille Basins. Planned and carried out a public information session on roads and stormwater as an adjunct to the updating for the Tactical Basin Plan for the Northern Lake Champlain Basin.
- Participated in planning and public engagement activities with partner organizations in the Northern Lake Champlain, Missisquoi Bay, and Lamoille Basins.
- Commenced project development effort examining potential water quality project sites in three Grand Isle County communities. Work was funded by a VT Department of Environmental Conservation via the Clean Water Service Provider managed by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. Prepared comprehensive report describing efforts to improve water quality in the Lake Carmi watershed by addressing private road erosion. Funded by a grant from the Lake Champlain Basin Program to NRPC. Also participated in Lake Carmi Coordination Team quarterly meetings.
- Coordinated project implementation for Trout River streambank restoration work in Montgomery. Funded by two grants from the Vermont Agency of Transportation.
- Continued to steward the Missisquoi Bay and Lamoille Basin Water Quality Councils (BWQC) and participate as member of Northern Lake Champlain BWQC.

- Support provided to BWQCs included conducting three more project funding rounds in each basin. NRPC directed funding to partners for nine new projects in Lamoille Basin and five new projects in Missisquoi Basin.
- As CWSP, also continued to develop and apply grant-management, project tracking, and project prioritization systems. Also continued to provide extensive input to DEC regarding the development of policy and guidance materials. Commenced additional program area focused on project operation and maintenance (O&M).
- Continued to support St. Albans City and St. Albans Town and their Regional Stormwater Education Program as partial fulfillment of MS4 permit obligations. With assistance from partners, organized several stream clean ups and workshops, and conducted major lake-themed student education events.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

### **HEALTHY ROOTS**

HRC works to improve food access, education, and develop essential infrastructure and programs that support farm viability—All of which directly impacts the health and wellness of our Northwest Vermont Communities. Here is a review of the work done by HRC in FY24:

- 60 farms were engaged in HRC programming. Through work in partnership with South Hero Land Trust, FC NRCD, NOTCH Richford Health Center, VHCB Farm Viability Program, Intervale and the Center for An Agricultural Economy, HRC provided 1-on-1 business assistance as well as held events throughout the year to support the agricultural economy.
- Through our work with 6 different farms, HRC saw an average of 12.5% increase in sales. This work also saw the development of sales & marketing plans, Cost of Production analysis, website development/updates and the development of 2 new products.
- 48,720 of produce gleaned, purchased, recovered, and grown that was delivered to 33 recipient sites throughout Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.
- 30 CSAs were a part of the pilot year of the Northwest Farmacy CSA developed in partnership with the NOTCH Richford Health Center. 30 individuals received weekly CSAs sourced from local farms over the course of 14 weeks. These were delivered to 8 NOTCH locations in Franklin County.
- HRC also regularly provided locally grown, culturally preferred produce to up to 39 migrant households in partnership with CVOEO and Bridges to Health.
- \$26,000 was brought into the community to purchase local food through Northwest Farmacy CSA, Migrant Household Food Boxes and NOTCH grab & go fridges.
- 180 students participated in Healthy Roots gleaning and food access programming. 6 schools were involved in gleaning field trips where they participated in the hands-on experience of harvesting various crops, such as apples, cabbages, lettuce, and squash.
- In partnership with CVOEO, HRC completed renovation of a new storage space in Sheldon. HRC Gleaning/Food Access programming started working out of the space in Fall of 2023.

### **NORTHWEST VERMONT COMMUNICATIONS UNION DISTRICT**

NRPC continued providing administrative and governance support to the Northwest Vermont Communications Union District (dba Northwest Fiberworx). This Unit of Local Government, made of representatives from communities within the region (plus Milton in Chittenden County) was

formed in 2020 to support the expansion of broadband services in the Region. Highlights from the past year include supporting the CUD in partnering with a Services Provider for delivery of broadband infrastructure and services; providing technical assistance to the NWCUD Governing Board, subcommittees and staff in developing administrative policies and assist with governance structures. Attended meetings of Governing Board and subcommittees as necessary or by request. Entered into a Continuity of Operation agreement to provide administrative and accounting services to the CUD should their staffing be disrupted. The goal of Northwest Fiberworx is to deliver reliable, affordable high-speed internet to unserved and underserved residents in the region.

### **HOUSING FOR ALL- WORKING COMMUNITIES CHALLENGE**

Northwest Regional Planning Commission serves as the backbone organization for a region-wide project focused on supporting the creation and improvement of housing for healthy, inclusive, and prosperous communities. The project is funded by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston as part of the Working Communities Challenge (WCC) initiative. The project has:

- Increased public awareness about the region's housing needs by conducting a Housing Needs Assessment and creating Voices From Home.
- Hosted a series of events, including a Community Conversation on Housing, Municipal Officials Meetings on Housing, a workshop on creating Accessory Dwelling Units, and a Housing Justice Joint Worship Service.
- Shared our work and lessons learned with others around the state; and
- Created a Housing Community of Practice among the WCC initiatives working on housing issues.
- Started production of Voices From Home, a video series capturing how the region's people have navigated the housing crisis.
- Worked to create two pilot projects focusing on home creation and home improvements.

### **EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

The NRPC Board underwent a year-long education effort in FY23 to understand equity and inclusion issues and hired Abundant Sun to aid in these efforts. NRPC adopted a statement of inclusion in FY22 and is identifying changes to plans, practices and programs in order to implement the goals of the statement. While the contract with Abundant Sun ended in February of 2023, NRPC continues to engage in education and efforts to understand equity and inclusion in our work on an ongoing basis. A summary of outcomes from our work over the last year is provided below:

- Incorporated equity principles into the draft Regional Plan (adopted 7/26/23).
- Awarded the EPA Environmental Justice Government to Government Program (EJG2G) for a grant award to accelerate and streamline equitable active transportation projects in our rural communities.
- Participated in the Department of Health's Health Equity Project, including developing municipal training opportunities (for FY24), Health Equity and Planning Toolkit, and working with the Town of Alburgh to incorporate health equity in its municipal plan.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

NRPC owns its building at 75 Fairfield Street in St. Albans, purchased in 2013. This provides budget certainty and enables NRPC to hold and manage an asset rather than pay rent. Planned renovation costs over the next three years are included in the budget and budget reserves, and the Board has adopted an accelerated mortgage repayment plan.

The Board utilizes a reserve fund policy for long-term financial planning. NRPC maintains Board designated reserve funds to cover operating shortfalls, accrued leave time, building renovations and equipment replacement. The Commission maintains a three-year plan for equipment and software upgrades and replacement.

The FY 24 NRPC budget was \$3.3 million. Revenue sources included state and federal performance contracts, grants and local assessments. Virtually all the NRPC's revenue sources are tied to contracts with scopes of work, guidelines and/or performance measures. This means that the NRPC has limited flexibility in how it chooses to use most of its funding. Funding received through municipal assessments is the exception, which makes this funding stream particularly important because it gives us the greatest latitude to respond to NRPC-identified needs in the region. The grants we receive enable us to work with our towns on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, brownfields redevelopment, energy, and natural resources. Revenue from virtually all federal and state grantors requires non-federal matching funds ranging from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant). Municipal assessments and regional planning funds passed through to NRPC under a performance contract with the Department of Housing and Community Development provide matching funds required by grantors.

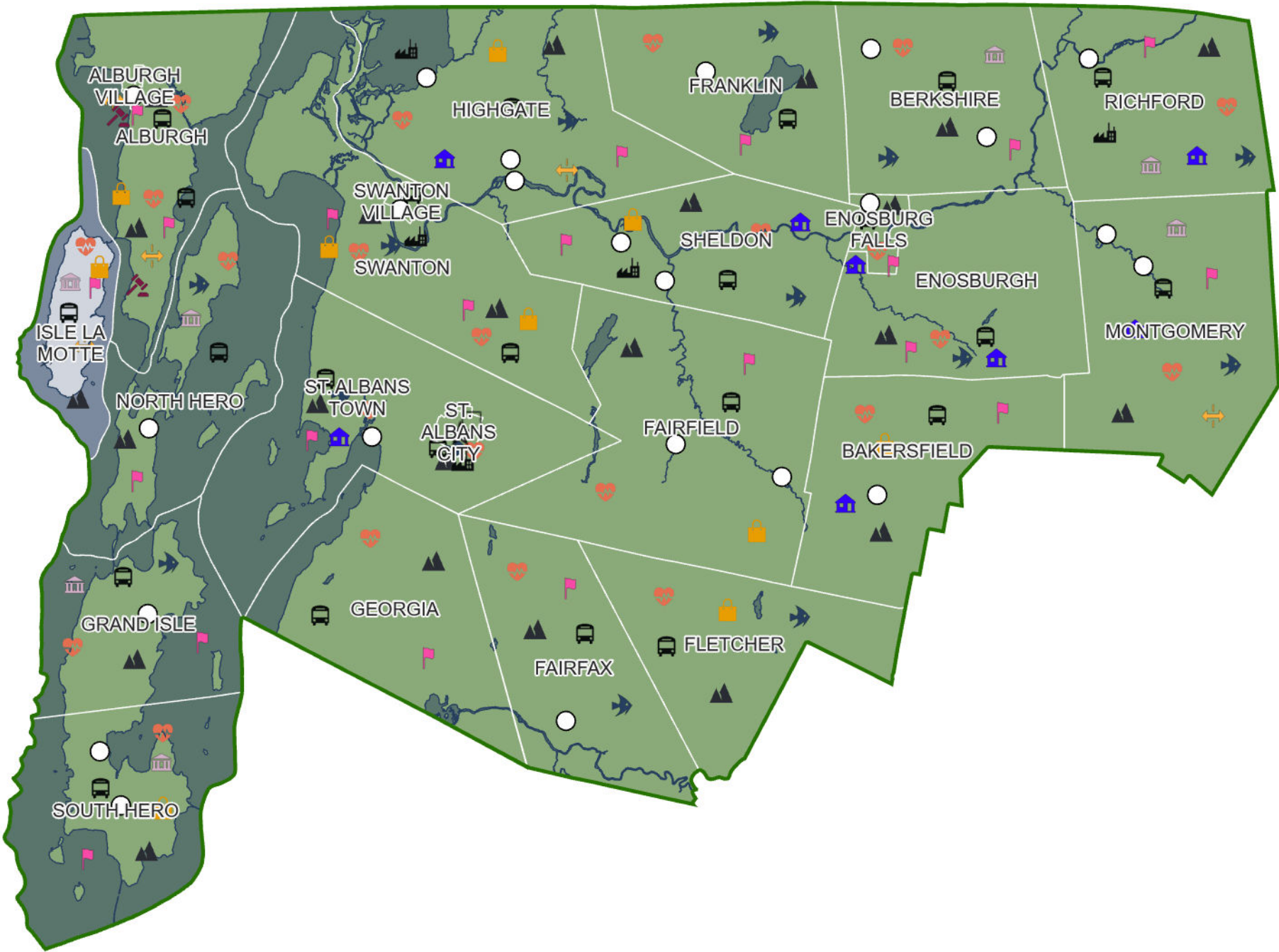
An audit is currently underway and will be completed by December 2024. NRPC has had no audit findings in over ten years. Staffing in FY 24 included: Executive Director, Assistant Director, Senior Planners (3), Regional Planner, Project Manager, Climate and Energy Planner, Transportation Planner, Assistant Planner and Zoning Administrator, GIS Technician, Office Administrator, Economic Recovery Coordinator, Healthy Roots Coordinators (2), Working Communities Challenge Manager, and interns (5). Six of the employees have been with NRPC for twenty years or more. An Eco-AmeriCorps and VISTA AmeriCorps member served at NRPC in FY 24.

## **'AT WORK' MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the NRPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.



# Northwest Regional Planning Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

### Designation

- ★ Designated Downtown
- Designated Village
- Designated Growth Center
- △ Neighborhood Development Area

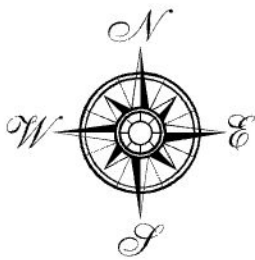
### Projects

- ◇ New Town Center
- Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation

- Clean Water
- Emergency Planning & Response
- Planning and Zoning Assistance
- Mapping
- Economic Development
- Grant Writing

### Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities

- Housing
- Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**
- Current
- Expired
- No Town Plan





# NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

## FY 2024 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, 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.

### PLANNING & 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, grant writing, and plan implementation projects. Here are some of our service highlights for FY2024:

- **First-Ever Town Plans:** In February 2024, the Town of Lunenburg adopted its first-ever [Town Plan](#). Developed with assistance from NVDA, the plan reflects an unusually robust level of community engagement and coalesces its goals and strategies around its guiding vision to become a “vibrant 21st century rural town that balances historical roots with responsible progress.” Soon after adopting its plan, Lunenburg Village and the Village of Gilman both received Village Center Designation. Also in FY2024, NVDA continued to provide technical assistance on behalf of the Town of Walden for the development of their first Town Plan. Articulating a vision for one of the richest histories of Vermont's communities provides resilience, community building, and asset and budget refinement. Through numerous stakeholder engagements, historical research, and asset identification, the newly formed Planning Commission should have a draft proposed for adoption by the end of calendar year 2024.
- **Municipal Planning Grants (MPG):** This program remains the lifeblood for our communities' planning and revitalization efforts. In FY2024, NVDA continued to consult with the Town of Sheffield on a major Town Plan Update, funded in part with a Municipal Planning Grant. The Town's Planning Commission has taken an ambitious and holistic approach to improving livability, branding, and culture for its residents through its planning efforts. Meanwhile, Craftsbury's MPG-funded planning efforts included a well-attended Community Values Mapping Session that asked participants to identify the places and values they hold most important. This planning effort will culminate in a new municipal plan that assesses strategies for managing rural residential development, as well as creating new housing opportunities in an unusually tight housing market. Both municipalities expect to have Town Plans proposed for adoption by the end of the year.

- **Grant Administration:** In FY2024, NVDA continued to administer 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. The designs, report, and presentation will be completed by fall of 2024 as the town will look towards avenues of implementation. Also in FY2024, NVDA continued to provide support to VCDP-funded improvements to the non-profit Craftsbury Community Care Center. Work is expected to wrap up by the end of calendar 2024.
- **Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP):** The Town of Canaan requested technical assistance funding through MTAP and was awarded funds to hire NVDA to help with the update of their Town Plan. Canaan is a vital hub for Essex County along with its border relations to New Hampshire and Canada. Coordinating their capacity and vision to meet those regional responsibilities while redeveloping their workforce will be part of the outcomes of their new plan. Plan adoption is on track for Spring 2025.
- **NVDA Brownfields Coalition:** In 2023, we were awarded a \$1,000,000 EPA Assessment Grant and a \$1,000,000 Revolving Loan Fund grant to continue facilitating brownfield revitalization in the Northeast Kingdom. To this point, the assessment grant has helped fund over 20 sites with various cleanup planning activities. Seven sites have been nominated to receive revolving loan fund grant money to facilitate cleanup activities. Once completed, the projects currently enrolled in NVDA's brownfields program will generate over 300 units of new housing in the NEK.
- **Housing Support:** In FY2024 NVDA provided technical support to an emerging community land trust serving Craftsbury, Greensboro, Albany, and Glover. The Headwaters Community Land Trust will be focused on acquiring land and developing permanently affordable housing. NVDA provided funds for legal support for the formal organization of Headwaters, and we look forward to a partnership with them in the coming years. Also, our Brownfield Assessment program assisted Rural Edge with projects in Newport, Newport Center, Greensboro, and St. Johnsbury. Finally, NVDA supported a feasibility study in St. Johnsbury that once completed, could support anywhere from 30 to 60 new units of housing.

Regional Planning Commissions coordinate planning in their respective regions through the adoption and implementation of comprehensive regional plans and related studies. NVDA's plan was updated and readopted last summer so that we could maintain substantial deference in Section 248 proceedings. We are now amending our plan to meet the requirements of Act 181, which includes a future land use map that must be approved by the newly formed Land Use Review Board by the end of calendar 2026.

Fortunately, NVDA had already commenced on an ambitious redevelopment of the regional plan, and these requirements can be integrated into the new format. The new plan will be reorganized along major themes such as equity, community empowerment, sustainability, and relevance to

the community. Elements will be concise and illustrative of the key challenges that our region faces, and additional data will be available in an appendix.

- **Future Land Use Mapping Committee:** In FY2024, NVDA staff continued to serve on a future land use advisory committee regarding land use classifications. The committee's work concluded at the end of calendar 2023, and the committee's findings were submitted to VAPDA, which were instrumental in drafting the final language that eventually made its way into Act 181.
- **Professional Development and Associations:** In FY2024, 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. In June of 2024, NVDA and the Town of Hardwick hosted the Vermont Community Development Association (VCDA) Spring Conference, which celebrated the power of municipalities in shaping vibrant communities and driving economic development. The event highlighted the pivotal role municipalities play in fostering vibrancy and resilience across Vermont and was VCDA's highest attended conference to date.
- **Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Coordination:** NVDA staff continues 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.

## ECONOMIC 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.

- **InnovateNEK:** In November of 2023 the U.S. Economic Development Administration announced the NVDA as one of its Build to Scale Venture Challenge grant recipients! With this \$1.5M Build grant, NVDA and DoNorth Coworking will partner to implement the InnovateNEK initiative. This effort will increase the pipeline of startup ideas and support services, and identify, engage, and connect the region's presently untapped pool of capital and talent. This effort will cultivate a regional community and culture around tech innovation, build off existing programming to implement a scalable startup support program, and develop a network of mentors and investors to increase access to social and financial capital needed to sustain and scale tech startups in the Northeast Kingdom.
- **Lyndon Small Business Fund:** In FY24, NVDA administered Lyndon's Small Business Fund, which supports businesses that have the desire and ability to scale, positively

impact the community, and leverage this one-time investment to support ongoing and sustainable business development. The fund awarded \$80,000 to four businesses 1) startup costs and marketing for a new flight school at the Caledonia County Airport; 2) completion of a commercial for an artisanal dumpling producer; 3) conversion of a hot dog cart to a brick-and-mortar restaurant in Lyndon Corner; and 4) the relocation of a beverage production and co-packing business to a new facility in Lyndon.

- **Technical Assistance and Grants:** In FY24 NVDA helped three businesses apply for Regional Economic Development Grants - Three Branches Cafe & Bakery, Built By Newport, and Barton Golf Club. This program, administered by the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services, provides competitive grants to municipalities and to nonprofit organizations to cover capital costs associated with maintenance, renovation, or equipment purchases related to the development of facilities expected to create or retain job opportunities. NVDA served as the local navigator for the Small Business Technical Assistance Exchange (SBTAE) program, which was designed to deliver critically important technical assistance to hundreds of businesses and organizations statewide to adapt business practices, retrofit space and access new technologies. Through the SBTAE program NVDA helped 17 small businesses in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties access over \$65,000 in technical assistance funds. Additionally, NVDA closed out its USDA Rural Development Business Grant (RBDG) funded Business Professional Assistance Program, which provided a total of \$99,000 in cost sharing for technical assistance to 15 local businesses. NVDA received a \$200,000 FY24 RBDG and will reopen our Business Professional Assistance Program in FY25. In FY24 NVDA also received a \$150,000 USDA Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training Grant CF TAT grant. Funds from this program are currently supporting predevelopment work for the Kingdom Trails NEK Outdoor Recreation Community Hub and a new coworking/innovation space in St. Johnsbury.
- **Regional Priorities:** In FY2024 NVDA compiled and updated its Regional Priority Projects List. This list is developed by Regional Development Corporations to identify community and economic development projects of regional importance that may need grant funding to advance. Input for the list comes from municipalities and regional partners.
- **Small Business Growth and Development:** NVDA partnered with Do North Coworking to continue to develop entrepreneurship resources and programming, like KickStartNEK, a 10-week program that uses the nationally-recognized Co.Starters curriculum to guide emerging ideas and small businesses through a process to build a sustainable and profitable entity. NVDA also sponsored the first annual Do North Business Pitch Competition in St. Johnsbury, which featured 12 startups from the Northeast Kingdom and the Upper Valley and awarded \$15,000 in prizes for best pitch, biggest community impact, and crowd favorite.
- **Yellow Barn Business Accelerator:** After years of planning, grant writing, and project management, this project achieved lift off in FY2024. Aided by a \$11.4 million NMTC bridge financing structure which closed at the end of FY2023, the project broke ground in August. The project consists of an adaptive reuse of the historic Yellow Barn at the gateway to

downtown Hardwick, as well as the construction of a new 25,000 sf facility alongside it. The Barn is occupied by Cabot Creamery Cooperative, who is showing its signature cheese as well as a variety of other Vermont-based offerings. The Accelerator is being occupied by Jasper Hill Farm to expand its e-commerce fulfillment and consolidate inventory from scattered locations statewide. Slightly more than half the space in the new facility will be occupied by the Center for an Agricultural Economy's farm-to-supply chain services, [Farm Connex](http://nvda.net/yellow_barn/). The Barn is substantially complete, and the Accelerator Shell will be shortly. In the meantime, NVDA continues to support the CAE in their fitup efforts, which are funded in part by a \$500,000 Catalyst Grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission. [http://nvda.net/yellow\\_barn/](http://nvda.net/yellow_barn/)

## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

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.

- **Sidewalks Dataset:** IN FY23, NVDA created a new geospatial dataset of sidewalks. VTrans (AOT) combined this with sidewalk data from other Regional Planning Commissions to create a statewide map of sidewalks. In FY24 NVDA continued updating this data with additional information including surface type, condition, width, ownership, and other pertinent details. NVDA focused on the areas with the most sidewalks: Newport City, St Johnsbury, Hardwick, Island Pond, Lyndonville. This can be used to inform future municipal planning efforts, as well as VTrans' own planning and prioritization efforts.
- **Road Erosion Inventories:** In FY24, NVDA completed full or partial road erosion inventories (REIs) for Westfield, Newport City, Newport Town, Danville, Ryegate, Troy, Charleston, Brighton, Waterford, Wheelock, Peacham, and Barnet. 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.
- **Rail Use Planning:** Also in FY24, NVDA completed a review of industrial parcels adjacent to active freight rail lines, namely the Canadian and Pacific line in Orleans County, the Washington County RR Connecticut River line, and the St Lawrence and Atlantic RR. This will be incorporated into VTrans' efforts to recruit rail use from businesses. Shifting more freight to rail decreases the burden on roadways and helps the state meet its climate goals.

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.
- 0 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

**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 hosted a Bike Walk Summit this year and provided support to towns in repeated flooding damage related to roads

## EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE

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.

Many of our efforts in the previous year helped to ensure that our communities qualified for level or even extra funding under the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund from the most recent floods this past July. With significant flood damage to roads and bridges, the extra 5% or even 10% to pay for damaged public infrastructure has proved to be a powerful incentive for our communities.

- **Flood Mitigation Planning:** In FY2024, NVDA helped the Town of Lyndon secure and administer a grant from the Flood Resilient Communities Fund. Funds were used to hire SLR International and Whiteout Solutions to scope alternatives that could improve the passage of floodwaters through the low-lying areas of Lyndonville and adjoining areas. This scoping study was critical in bringing years of study and analysis to action. In and around the village, debris blockages push the floodway into nearby low-lying areas, creating extremely hazardous conditions in roadways, a mobile home park, and several nearby businesses. This project used state of the art LIDAR imaging to perform hydraulic analyses of numerous mitigation scenarios, helping the Town make informed decisions on a long-standing and devastating issue.
- **Local Hazard Mitigation Plans:** 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 early FY2024, both Hardwick and Greensboro had expired Local Hazard Mitigation Plans. NVDA quickly mobilized with funding and technical assistance to get plans submitted to VEM within 30 days of the disaster declaration, saving both towns substantial amounts of money. Both plans have now been approved by FEMA.
- **FEMA Map Updates:** In FY2024, our region began to receive draft updates to local Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS). 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. Unfortunately, nearly all of the existing FIRMs are on paper, light on data, and difficult to interpret. The new FIRMs will be vastly improved and consist of a digitization over 1-foot contours. In May, NVDA hosted a well-attended workshop at the Highland Arts Center in Greensboro for local officials, where they could

pose questions to Agency of Natural Resources staff and learn what to expect as FEMA begins to release its updated FIRMs.

- **Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMP):** Every community is required to have a LEMP, which gets updated annually, typically after Town Meeting Day. Also known as the "pocket plan", the LEMP is a portable, efficient guide for use in the early stages of disaster response. IN FY2024, NVDA staff assisted all municipalities in our region with the LEMP update and adoption process.
- **Special Training and Planning Exercises:** NVDA staff continue to participate in special planning exercises such as the Great Bay Hydro Corp. Dam Emergency Action Seminar, which is held annually in December. NVDA staff participated in the Training, Exercise, and Planning Workshop, the Stakeholder Preparedness Review, the Integrated Preparedness Plan Exercise, and the annual Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference. NVDA staff also participate in the monthly VEM/RPC conference calls. NVDA staff made municipal officials aware of any training that was available which could assist them in their positions, such as the Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference held in Burke in September, 2023.
- **Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC):** NVDA staff took the lead role in organizing two Regional Emergency Management Committees, which replaced the Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC) in 2021. There have been five meetings with each of these REMCs in the past year. Both REMCs have identified training and exercises they want to participate in over the next three years.
- **July 2023 Flood Response:** NVDA staff had to pivot and realign resources due to the unprecedented damage from flooding. NVDA staff assisted at the State Emergency Operations Center during this time, and the local liaisons from NVDA promptly reached out to all the communities in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans County to get damage reports to Vermont Emergency Management in a timely manner. NVDA staff met with FEMA and SBA officials in Hardwick, Sheffield, Barton, Orleans, Glover, and Greensboro to look at homes and businesses that were damaged. NVDA staff also visited every community to assist with damage assessments. We also added a Flood Resource page to our web site and expanded our newsletter to include recovery resources. Finally, NVDA made themselves available to assist reviewing Vermont Community Foundation grant applications from farmers who have experienced crop losses during the July storms and flooding.
- **December 2023 Storm Response:** NVDA's local liaisons were once again activated for the December 2023 storm and promptly reached out to all the communities in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties to get damage reports to Vermont Emergency Management in a timely manner.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** NVDA staff worked with the town of Maidstone to secure a grant so they could purchase a generator for the Maidstone Town Clerk's office which also serves the Emergency Operations Center and Shelter during emergencies.



- **Municipal Services Complex:** In FY2024, NVDA secured and administered \$75,000 in Municipal Technical Assistance Funds for the Town of Hardwick. The funds will be used to secure architectural and engineering assistance to explore the feasibility of establishing 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 could 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. When completed, this initiative will determine the feasibility of safely locating all three critical functions, identifying permitting and engineering challenges, as well as potential funding strategies.

## 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.

- **Village Center and Downtown Designations:** Village Center Designation maps are always meaningful, because they have a direct and near-immediate effect on aiding towns to realize their vision. The Town of Lunenburg, who adopted their first Town Plan this year, saw a clear benefit in participating in this program. In FY2024, our GIS Specialist produced Village Center Designation maps for Lunenburg Village and the Village of Gilman. Both maps were approved by the Village Center Designation Program.
- **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. For a town like Craftsbury, this process helped to elevate local conversations that shape planning goals and policy. In FY2024, NVDA provided GIS support to Craftsbury's CVM process to provide fascinating insights into shared and diverging values in the community. We look forward to seeing how the results from this process will inform the new municipal plan.
- **Energy Mapping:** In FY2024, 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."

## ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

In FY2024 NVDA updated its regional energy plan to support the overarching goals of the Vermont Climate Action Plan, Comprehensive Energy Plan, and new Environmental Justice Law. Our readopted Regional Plan for the Northeast Kingdom continues to enjoy "substantial deference," under Act 174, which gives the plan heightened consideration in Section 248 proceedings. Additionally, our plan data provide a framework for communities in our region to develop enhanced energy plans of their own. This year, the Barnet Town Plan (adopted February 2024) became the 17<sup>th</sup> community in our region to receive substantial deference under Act 174. Many of our early enhanced plan adopters are now working on amendments and updates.

We continue to focus on putting our energy plan – and local plans -- into action, with a heightened concern for reducing energy burden and internalizing energy justice principles. Energy burden, which is measured as a percentage of household income spent on energy, is particularly high in the Northeast Kingdom. This is a concern for the NEK because when a disproportionate amount of income is spent on energy, it can lead to energy poverty and lasting health and economic hardships. Therefore, concerted efforts must take place to reduce energy burden in the NEK and statewide. To ensure that our energy use transformations are equitable and affordable, we maintain ongoing dialogue with our valued partners: Efficiency Vermont, utilities companies in the NEK, as well as critical weatherization resources, such as HEAT Squad, Northeast Employment and Training Organization, Northeast Kingdom Community Action, and Capstone.

- **Energy Assessments:** NVDA received funding through Act 172 to provide application and technical assistance for our municipalities through the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. 51 out of 52 communities enrolled in the program, receiving a total of 125 energy assessments on municipally owned buildings. These reports outline energy-saving measures and provide a framework for upgrades to be covered through the Implementation Grant phase. NVDA hosted outreach and education to our municipalities to understand the content of the reports, identify priorities and future use, in addition to preparing for the Implementation Grant.
- **Say WATT:** In FY2024, NVDA partnered with the Public Service Department to host two “Say WATT” events in Sept 2023 (one online, one in-person) engaging over 150 participants in the NEK region and soliciting input on the future of electricity in Vermont, ahead of the 2024 legislative session to determine what changes are necessary to achieve state energy, climate and equity goals. Review [NVDA's report](https://www.nvda.org/reports/say-watt) following the September "Say WATT" listening sessions to see what top electricity priorities were identified in the NEK. [https://www.caledonianrecord.com/news/local/community-enjoys-solarbration/article\\_857cc07f-5ce3-56d5-a286-9b80c8d6f868.html](https://www.caledonianrecord.com/news/local/community-enjoys-solarbration/article_857cc07f-5ce3-56d5-a286-9b80c8d6f868.html)
- **NEK Solarbration:** In Sept 2023, NVDA co-hosted the “NEK Solarbration” public Energy Fair in Peacham. The event brought over 100 attendees to the site of Peacham’s new 150 kW community solar array, which provides renewable energy benefits to Town buildings, local homes, farms, and businesses. The event featured innovations and opportunities for agrivoltaics, electric vehicles, weatherization, plus family-friendly fun, arts, music and food!
- **Button Up!** In Oct 2023, over 30 attendees at the in-person Energy Fair and Button Up event in Essex County at the Brighton Town Hall focused on resources and programs for making weatherization affordable and accessible to all. A panel of energy experts and event partners presented and tabled including Efficiency Vermont, HEAT Squad, NETO, Rural Edge, VEC, VPPSA, and NEKCA GreenSavingSmart.
- **Climate Catalyst:** Thanks to a Vermont Council on Rural Development Climate Catalyst Innovation grant, NVDA will be covering the cost for up to 20 NEK residents in this online training: "Intro to Solar Installation & Design." This course is designed for beginners, so no experience with electronics is necessary. It's fully online and can be done at students' own pace. The class focuses on the skills and knowledge required to design and install small-

scale solar electrical systems. Students from North Country Career Center, North Country Union High School, NETO Weatherization, Canaan Technical Center, and municipal representatives are participating. Learn more: <https://solarpytraining.com/courses/residential-solar-installation-design/>

## CLEAN WATER

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.

- **Invasives Management:** In FY2024, NVDA developed and instituted a Vector Lake Management Plan for Lake Memphremagog. Two greeter programs were present (Gateway Center and Whipple Point), and three Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting projects (Gateway Center, Whipple Point and South Bay) were completed at fishing access areas. The idea is to clear the apron of the fishing access area of invasive species so the number of fragments leaving on watercraft trailers will be greatly reduced, which prevents the spread of invasive species to other NEK waterbodies. Funding was obtained through the Memphremagog Watershed Association (MWA) from VTDEC and the Great Lakes Fishing Commission (GLFC) grants. Projects like this are vital to municipalities, because studies have shown that towns with waterbodies that contain uncontrolled invasive species experience significant property value decreases. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921800910003708>)
- **Grant Award:** NVDA's Water Quality Planner serves as the first Chairperson of the Basin 17 Basin Water Quality Council. In FY2024, she was part of the discussion and planning for the distribution of the \$3.1 million award from the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission to the Memphremagog Basin for fisheries and water quality projects.
- **Wakeboats:** In FY2024, NVDA provided comments and recommendations to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation regarding the new 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.

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

NVDA's uniquely dual role as Regional Planning Commission and Economic Development Corporation allows us to take on unusual and challenging endeavors.

- **Northeast Kingdom Development Corporation:** NVDA's Director continues to serve on the board of this private non-profit 501(c)(3), which serves as a catalyst for local economic development projects requiring public-private partnerships. As the fiscal agent for the Hardwick Yellow Barn project, NEKDC has been the primary entity to secure bridge financing as well as a New Market Tax Credit (NMTC) allocation. The NEKDC also worked with the City of Newport to acquire and renovate a vacant 47,000 sf manufacturing facility that was part of a failed EB-5 project. NVDA provides critical technical and bookkeeping support to the NEKDC, which also maintains a subsidiary that receives an NMTC subsidy and must oversee and manage the Yellow Barn through its critical unwind period.
- **St. Johnsbury Food Co-op:** Over the summer of 2023, the Caledonia Food Co-op successfully raised \$350,000 in donations over the course of just a few weeks to secure the former Walgreens property in downtown St. Johnsbury as the location for their co-op. As part of this process, NVDA leveraged funds from their EPA Assessment Grant to conduct site assessments and produce a corrective action plan that will guide the site's cleanup activities. The group officially purchased the building in 2024 and plans to open their doors as soon as possible, expanding access to healthy food for residents and supporting the positive developments occurring in St. Johnsbury's downtown.
- **Community Visits:** NVDA has been a critical partner in the Vermont Council of Rural Development Community Visit process for several years now, and more than a dozen of our communities have emerged from this public-engagement session with a renewed perspective and focus on grass-roots community development. This year we joined the VCRD in a visit to Albany, which identified the rehabilitation of historic structures as a critical goal.
- **New Life for the St J Armory:** Since 2009, the historic Armory building on Main Street in St. Johnsbury has been vacant due to the presence of regulated building materials (RBMs) as well as structural concerns. The cost of upgrading the armory to meet current building codes was deemed too high and resulted in the building remaining empty for so many years. By utilizing NVDA's brownfields funds as well as leveraging other state and federal funds, the town has been able to conduct the necessary environmental, structural, architectural, and economic evaluations in order to move forward with repurposing the armory as the new location for the St. Johnsbury Police Department and Regional Dispatch Center. Cleanup activities are expected to begin in September of 2024.

## ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING

NVDA's revenues come from a myriad of sources, including a share of the state's property transfer funds; private, state, and federal grants; and annual appropriations from our member communities. We also receive rental income from our multi-tenant building in the St. Johnsbury-Lyndon Industrial Park, as well as income from contracted services from municipalities, including municipal plan and bylaw development funded by Municipal Planning Grants.

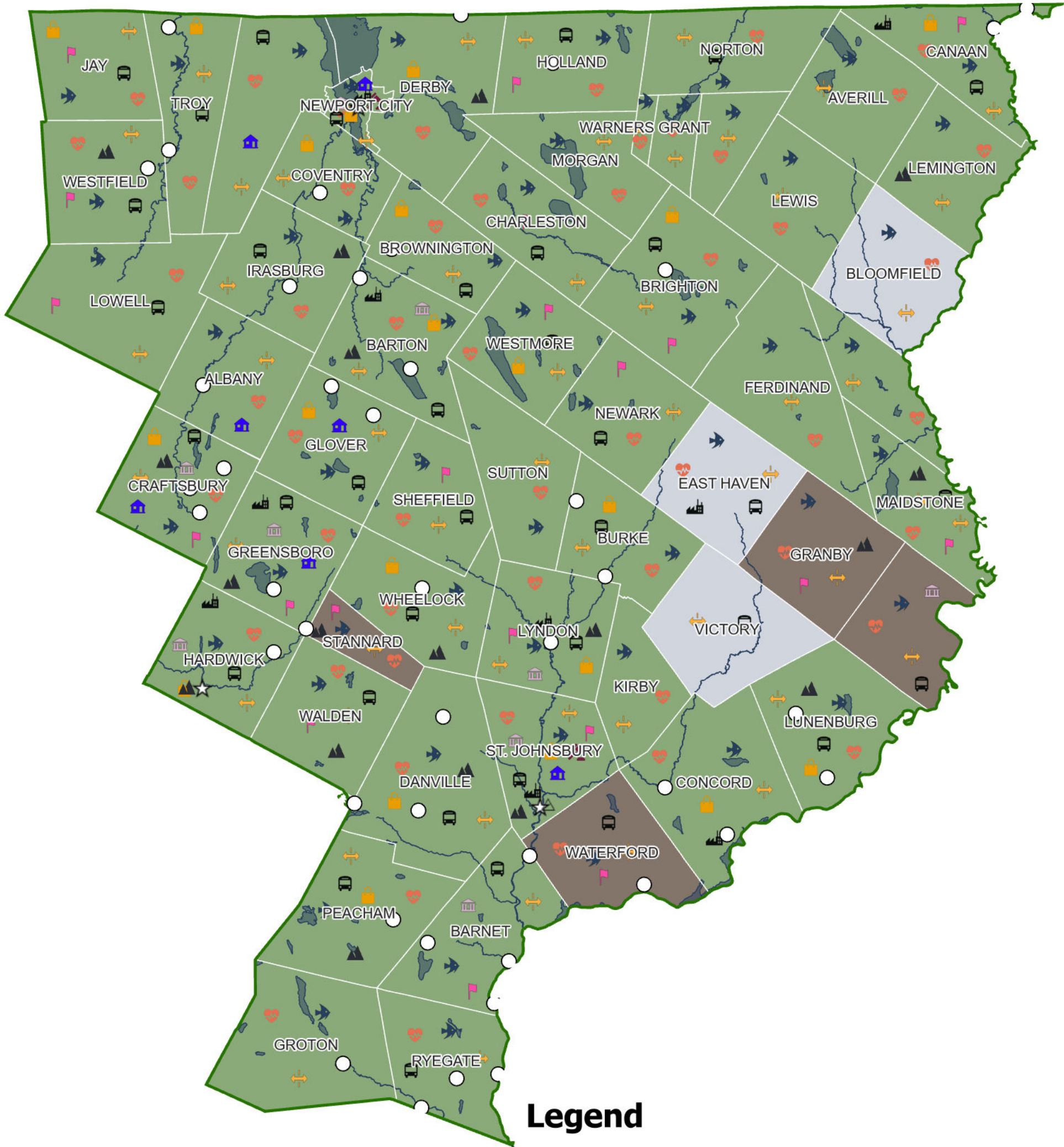
- **Community Development and Relending:** NVDA is an approved Non-Profit Community Development Organization, which allows us to operate a revolving loan fund recapitalized by loan repayments from previous economic development projects. We also now maintain a Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund. Our FY2024 audit will be made available at the end of the calendar year.
- **Timely news and communications:** NVDA continued the publication and distribution of its regular e-newsletters with a circulation of about 1,400. In FY2024, NVDA's e-newsletter was distributed monthly to keep readers informed of opportunities for community and economic development. NVDA also produces a monthly Energy Newsletter detailing relevant programs and events, funding and learning opportunities, energy incentives/rebates, and more related to energy and resilience in the NEK. The newsletter has a 50% open rate and is often recirculated by the media. We also maintain a web site ([www.nvda.net](http://www.nvda.net)) as a resource for reliable and detailed information on each of our member municipalities. Every effort is made to keep it up to date so that users can access and download current plans, bylaws, maps, data, and other important information for our readers. NVDA also organizes 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 in the NEK.

## **'AT WORK' MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the NVDA to member municipalities is included on the next page.



# Northeastern Vermont Development Association at Work FY 2024



## Legend

- Designation**

  - ☆ Designated Downtown
  - Designated Village
  - Designated Growth Center
  - Neighborhood Development Area
- Projects**

  - New Town Center
  - Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
  - Energy Planning & Implementation
  - Clean Water
  - Emergency Planning & Response
  - Planning and Zoning Assistance
  - Mapping
  - Economic Development
  - Grant Writing
- Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities**

  - Housing
  - Brownfields

**Municipal Plan Status**

  - Current
  - Expired
  - No Town Plan

## **RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

### **FY 2024 Annual Report**

The Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) represents the 27 municipalities of the Rutland Region in Southwest Vermont. Created in 1967, the RRPC leverages the power of people working together to assist municipalities provide effective local government services and to work cooperatively to address regional issues. The RRPC primary goals are to advocate for the needs of our member towns, and to articulate a vision for building a thriving and sustainable regional economy while enhancing the region's quality of life. RRPC staff provide technical services to local, state and federal levels of government and to the Region's non-profits, organizations and businesses.

### **PLANNING & ZONING**

RPCs coordinate planning at the regional level through the adoption and implementation of a regional plan. These plans guide local planning and the investment decisions of the public and private sectors.

- The RRPC began a comprehensive update of the 2018 Regional Plan with a focus on equity, healthy communities and climate resilience.
- The RRPC held a two-day regional plan staff retreat with a strategic planning consultant to kick-off the regional plan rewrite and organize the development process.
- The RRPC contracted with B Creative to create a regional plan engagement strategy. The RRPC then held its first phase of public engagement called, "Learn and Assess" which included 27 town presentations, 25 pop-up events, 5 community open houses, RRPC board presentation, technical workshops, focus groups, and a public survey. These efforts were combined with a robust marketing and outreach campaign using social media, front porch forum, newsletters, print media, email blasts, and a dedicated regional plan website. The "Learn and Assess" phase, along with dedicated research, helped to inform the first draft of the regional plan.
- The RRPC used the Regional Plan to evaluate applications and participate in the Act 250 and Section 248 projects. The RRPC Regional Committee reviewed seven (7) Act 250 projects and four (4) Section 248 projects for conformance with the Regional Plan.
- The 2018 Rutland Regional Plan articulates a vision for the Rutland region: economic, social, and environmental resilience; incremental and long-term growth; urban design; and walkable, connected communities. The RRPC continues to provide the tools and information towns need to make smart decisions and also provides space for people to learn, share, and come together around topics that impact the Rutland Region.

RPCs act as a cost-effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has focused on improving town plans, local permitting through education and consultations, bylaw modernization, economic development planning, and grant administration. This work is supported through local and regional planning funds, local contributions and other funding sources. Highlights include:

- Provided technical assistance to twenty (20) planning commissions.
- Assisted with town plan updates for the towns of Brandon, Chittenden, Clarendon, Fair Haven, Hubbardton, Mount Holly, Pittsford, and West Rutland.
- Assisted with zoning bylaw modernization, along with reviewing and updating zoning bylaws for conformance with the HOME Act for the towns of Brandon, Castleton, Clarendon, Fair Haven, Killington, Mendon, Pawlet, Pittsford, Poultney, Rutland City, and Wallingford.
- Assisted the Town of Wells with establishing a new village center designation.
- Provided guidance and technical assistance to Administrative Officers implementing local land use bylaws, subdivision regulations, and town plans.
- Reviewed flood hazard area bylaws for the twenty-five municipalities with such bylaws to ensure they meet the most up-to-date minimum federal requirements. Where bylaws had any issues, the municipality was notified, and RRPC provided guidance on how to correct it. This was done to ensure the region's residents in areas of high flood risk will be able to maintain National Flood Insurance Program enrollment eligibility.
- Hosted a municipal training and roundtable on the Open Meeting Law with the Vermont Secretary of State.

## HOUSING

RPCs were given Housing Resource Navigator funding to work with municipalities, regional and local housing organizations, and private developers to identify housing opportunities, match communities with funding resources, and provide project management support.

- Developing two versions of a regional Housing Resource Guide, which outlines up-to-date information on over 30 funding opportunities to lower development costs, and over 45 informational resources to support local developers and housing organizations. This regional guide was marketed electronically and on local bulletin boards across the region.
- Co-hosted a Southwest Vermont training on the Home for All Toolkit, in partnership with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, and Bennington Regional Commission.
- Developed and marketed the 2023 Rutland Region Housing Needs Assessment and regional and state housing funds.



- Worked with the City of Rutland, Community and Economic Development of the Rutland Region, housing groups, and local developers to create a housing group to advise on the mayor's goal of creating 1,000 new housing units over the next five years.
- Performed a Housing Survey for the Town of Rutland to better understand housing needs and to identify opportunities in the Town.
- Developed spatial analysis planning tools for housing such as "highest and best use" and "housing constraints" maps.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid land use planning principles. RPCs work with towns and other organizations to this end in a number of ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long-term economic growth.

- Continued participation in the West-Central Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy with the creation of a formal West Central Vermont Economic Development District Board of Directors, further advancing the approval of an Economic Development District under the U.S. Economic Development Administration.
- Completed Phase 2 of the Rutland Regional Asset Mapping Project (RAMP) through a Health Equity implementation grant through the Vermont Department of Health. The RRPC conducted a health equity survey and public engagement that informed the schema for the RAMP mapping and the work plan for Phase 3 of the project.
- Provided technical assistance to the City of Rutland for the development of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district and to the Town of Killington for TIF implementation.
- Provided technical assistance to twelve (12) towns through the Municipal Technical Assistance Program, helping with project review and prioritization for rural infrastructure improvements. Completed a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment including a town-wide survey for Tinmouth.
- Began developing engineering design and providing construction funding support for improvements to community facilities in Benson, through the Municipal Technical Assistance Program. This project seeks to enhance the accessibility, resiliency, and recreational value of the main public space in the Town of Benson – which contains the Public Library, Community Hall, and Town Clerk's Office.
- Initiated design and construction grant writing for improvements to the West Pawlet Wastewater Treatment Facility, through the Municipal Technical Assistance Program. This project will lower operational expenses associated with the facility, which have increased due to declining demand and rising costs.

- The RRPC helped Rutland Region Workforce Investment Board (RRWIB) form a new Board of Directors for 2024 – 2026 and worked to coordinate a bimonthly meeting schedule for the group. The Board is made up of representatives from major regional employers, the public school system, as well as state and local government.
- An updated Work Plan was created with technical assistance from the RRPC, outlining RRWIB’s mission and goals for the next three years.
- The RRPC submitted a proposal to the U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) Round 6 grant competition in partnership with RRWIB, as well as Stafford Technical Center, Vermont Department of Labor, Casella Construction, Naylor & Breen, Stubbins Electrical, and the City of Rutland. The decision to apply for this grant came as a result of guidance from the RRWIB Board, and the proposal seeks to create a regional workforce development system that will enhance technical education and on-the-job training for local high school graduates, youth who have dropped out of school, and refugees relocating to the Rutland Region.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play key roles in all phases of Emergency Management – preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. RPCs partner with state and regional agencies on measures such as trainings, plans, and exercises to help communities prepare in advance of an incident to ensure effective response. During an incident, we provide direct staff support to the State Emergency Operations Center and coordinate the timely collection of local damage information. Prior to the next disaster, RPCs provide municipalities with the technical assistance needed to complete mitigation priorities to make them more disaster resilient, and assist as needed, in special circumstances such as the DR-4720 and other declared disasters. Highlights include:

- Maintained the structure and operations of the Rutland Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC), which exists to coordinate emergency planning and preparedness activities. This included soliciting the reappointment of voting members for FY24 adopting a Meeting Time Resolution to ensure compliance with Open Meeting Law; coordinating and supporting four (4) quarterly meetings; reviewing and amending the Regional Plan outlining regional coordination procedures and available resources to support local response efforts. REMC successfully adopted an amendment to the Bylaws redefining quorum in light of Bill H.456 REMC also elected a new Chair, who served until the third quarterly meeting of FY24.
- Assisted individual municipalities with a range of planning efforts – primarily Local Emergency Management Plans and Hazard Mitigation Plans. Began the development of Local Hazard Mitigation Plans for Middletown Springs and Rutland City.

- Conducted one-on-one outreach with most of the Region’s municipalities to inform them of the latest round of funding (up to \$90 million) through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Presented and discussed potential project opportunities at Selectboard meetings in Clarendon, Danby, Proctor, and West Haven. Coordinated with Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Town of Shrewsbury to line up a potential application for the impending dam removal on Mountain School Road.
- Worked with municipalities to maximize their State Emergency Relief Assistance Fund rating, including enrollment in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- Coordinated with Vermont Emergency Management to conduct an After-Action Review (in relation to the State Emergency Operations Center) of DR-4720.
- Coordinated two tabletop exercises, both focused on long-term power outages in preparation for the Binary Blizzard Tabletop in 2024 and the Full-Scale Exercise in 2025.
- Reviewed the Rutland Region Vulnerable Populations Communication Protocol with local municipal emergency management officials and regional social service agencies. The Protocol was activated twice during FY24: once for a strong wind event that primarily affected Castleton in January 2024 and once for a late winter storm that caused power outages Region-wide in April 2024. For the latter, 11 municipalities and all four of our “critical” regional social service agencies verified receipt of the VT-Alert message. The revision and drilling from FY23 paid off, as Middletown Springs stated, “Everyone I talked with knew exactly why I was calling and what they should do.”
- Hosted several meetings and training to strengthen local capacity in the areas of: shelter activation and management, long-term power outage response, and public works mutual aid agreement procedures. Reviewed the outcomes of the Agreement’s first activation during DR-4720.
- Inducted the Towns of Proctor and West Rutland into the Chittenden Reservoir Emergency Action Plan (CREAP) Team. Green Mountain Power worked with Kleinschmidt to expand inundation mapping from Center Rutland to the Gorham Road Bridge. RRPC will coordinate with VEM to develop emergency action plans for Proctor and West Rutland in FY25.
- Participated in meetings of the Rutland Regional Medical Center, Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport, and Slate Valley Unified School District safety teams. Also participated in the Regional Airport’s Annual Tabletop Exercise and RRPC’s Active Shooter Tabletop.
- Two RRPC staff maintained their qualifications to serve in the State Emergency Operations Center. One of the two served in the SEOC during the July 2023 floods.
- Overhauled internal procedures involving additional RRPC staff in the Local Liaison process.
- Served on the State Hazard Mitigation Grant Application Review Committee.

- Worked with Mount Tabor to complete a Flood Risk Scoping Study to evaluate alternatives for mitigating flood risk posed by the Big Branch tributary of the Otter Creek.
- Supported rollout of the Municipal Vulnerability Indicator Tool, developed by the Climate Action Office, to municipalities in the Rutland Region.

## **ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION**

RRPC has been working with municipalities, energy & conservation committees, and regional organizations to achieve increased levels of energy efficiency with direct benefit to area residents. RRPC has taken an active role in administering the MERP program, DOE and EPA grant applications, assisting with Section 248 review, EV infrastructure projects, building a regional energy committee network, and drafting Enhanced Energy Plans.

- Administered the MERP grant for the current phase of the program. This included coordinating energy assessments for municipal buildings; reviewing and interpreting assessment reports with towns and providing outreach to increase participation in the mini-grant program. In addition, RRPC coordinated with all RPCs to provide Buildings and General Services with key input on the Implementation phase application and guidance.
- Assisted towns with MERP mini-grant implementation. This resulted in 2 energy efficiency events (Chittenden and Mount Holly); 4 contract to draft Enhanced Energy Plans (Killington, Middletown Springs, Pittsford, and Tinmouth); 1 electric tool lending library (Brandon); 1 Infrared camera lending library (Pawlet)
- Submitted application to administer regional thermal energy conservation program using Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding.
- Assisted the Town of Chittenden in creating an energy committee and applying for Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding to increase committee capacity and to write an Enhanced Energy Plan.
- RRPC has collaborated with Neighborworks of Western VT on submitting an EPA Community Change Grant. This requires a partnership between a local government partner with at least one Community Based Organization. This grant would allow Neighborworks to provide expanded energy efficiency and weatherization work for the most disadvantaged community members in our region. This expanded capacity will then help our region meet the goals of our Regional Enhanced Energy Plan.
- Revamping the Section 248 review process for our Board of Commissioners with the goal of making the process more streamlined, consistent, and community focused. This will include assisting the Regional Committee in taking a more proactive approach to influencing the process during the 45-day notice period.

- Conducted outreach and provided technical assistance to municipalities related to applying for the Vermont Community Charger EVSE grant program. Both Pittsford and Rutland Town successfully applied for this grant.
- RRPC will work with Green Mountain Power to determine the feasibility of installing ROW located EVSE in proximity to multi-unit dwellings with the intention of providing renters access to electric vehicle charging at home.
- Worked with the Town of Sudbury to research equipment and grant availability for replacing diesel loader with electric loader.
- Actively worked with Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union to understand the feasibility of replacing older buses with electric buses. This included providing details on the EPA clean bus program to RNESU, providing introductions to RNESU with bus distributors, and arranging for equipment testing opportunity.
- Organized a Regional Energy Consortium composed of regional energy committees to provide educational and networking opportunities.
- Conducted outreach to all 27 municipalities to help writing Enhanced Energy Plans.
- RRPC assisted the town of Brandon in writing an adopted and certified Enhanced Energy Plan

## **CLEAN WATER**

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to coordinate the South Lake Champlain Clean Water Service Provider and Basin Water Quality Council as well as assist with completion of the EPA required watershed plans and tactical basin plans and related projects:

- As the designated Clean Water Service Provider (CWSP) for the South Lake Champlain Watershed, RRPC worked with our partner, the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District (PMNRCD), to continue readying natural-based projects for review by the Basin Water Quality Council (BWQC). Four rounds of Requests for Projects were held in FY24 and a total of 12 ongoing projects were identified by the CWSP as eligible or early stage (needing more analysis), or for design or completion in the South Lake Basin which extends from northern Bennington County to northern Addison County. The approved projects were in Dorset, Pawlet, Castleton, Fair Haven, Poultney, Addison, and Panton. The total awards for projects as of the end of FY24 was \$293,530.61. The CWSP also made progress on meeting the TMDL target for phosphorus reduction that is a requirement in our contract with DEC.
- Worked with Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC), which was designated the CWSP for the Otter Creek Watershed, by being a member of its BWQC and providing input on projects proposed in that basin (which includes part of the Rutland Region) and by being a member of its finance committee.

- Worked with Benson, Orwell, and Mount Ascutney Regional Commission to secure a Clean Water Design Implementation Block Grant to alleviate water quality and road erosion issues at Sunset Lake. Watershed Consulting Associates was selected as the subcontractor for a 30% Preliminary design to find options for reducing runoff and erosion from Lake Sunset Road from getting into the lake. The new owners of the former Boy Scout Camp that's adjacent to the road and the lake association have been included as key partners in the design process.
- Worked with DEC Stormwater Program to improve outreach to 3-Acre Permit properties throughout Rutland County. DEC had been only sending letters to the owners through the mail. RRPC created an email and phone list to facilitate communications with those affected by the permit to keep them up to date about funding programs and training sessions with DEC.
- Worked with Rutland Town, the VDEC floodplain manager, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, and the Vermont Nature Conservancy to do outreach to the town for adding adoption of river corridor mapping and protections in its Flood Hazard and River Corridor Bylaw.
- Initiated meetings with Rutland City to find funding for projects to address its MS4 needs.
- Continued to work with Tinmouth to generate participation in VDEC's Lake Wise Program and assessments at Chipman Lake.
- Under an EPA/VDEC 604b grant, updated the State's Watershed Projects Database with Clean Water Act projects with projects from river plans in the Otter Creek Basin.

## **BROWNFIELDS**

The Rutland Region Brownfields Program (BRP) has existed for 18 years and received approximately \$3 million in funding from the US EPA to conduct community-wide assessment activities and redevelopment planning. Funding for this work has been reinvested in the Region and leveraged other funding sources, making the program an essential land use and economic development tool for municipalities. Highlights include:

- Coordinated assessment and redevelopment work for ten (10) projects across five different (5) municipalities: Rutland City, Rutland Town, Pittsford, Proctor, and Poultney.
- Continued work on site assessment, as well as remediation financing for the former Berwick Hotel site in Downtown Rutland. The site is planned for development into a multi-story, mixed-use development in the heart of Rutland.
- Performed assessment work at the former Lynda Lee Fashions manufacturing facility in Rutland City, which is setting the stage for a redevelopment of the historic building. The redevelopment of this site is a focus of the Rutland City TIF District.

- Supported assessment at the former Vermont Marble Company facility in downtown Proctor, to redevelop the 26-acre property into a mixed-use development which will include light manufacturing.
- Performed assessment and planning work for a Housing Trust of Rutland County project in ~~West~~
- Further formalized and expanded the RRPC Brownfields Steering Committee to encourage regional collaboration and maximize the efficacy of the program.

## **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 the 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 RRPC remains focused on working with its municipalities to establish effective multimodal networks, which will serve as a pillar for the development of strong villages and downtown centers, increasing the economic viability of the region at large.

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

- Held ten (10) Rutland Region Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings.
- Worked with ~~25~~ twenty seven (27) municipalities in the Rutland Region actively engaged in regional and municipal transportation planning.
- Reviewed five (5) plan sets for VTrans projects in Rutland Region.
- Developed bylaws, conducted outreach, recruited municipal representatives and board members for Delaware & Hudson Rail Trail Council.
- Organized and held monthly Delaware & Hudson Rail Trail Council meetings to discuss ongoing planning efforts, municipal level solutions, and the Missing Link property dispute preventing the completion of the trail between Poultney, VT and Granville, NY.

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

- Serving as a Chair and Board Member of the Marble Valley Regional Transit District Board of Commissioners and working toward implementation of Rutland City Fixed Route consolidation.
- Held five (5) meetings of regional OA&D Public Transit Advisory Committee.
- Participated in VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program Selection Committee.
- Reviewed one (1) Act 250 applications related to transportation.
- Coordinated ~~3~~ four (4) activities in support of Regional Public Transit Providers (OA&D, Bus Board, Route Consolidation, and Bus Stop Improvement Planning).
- Initiated drafting of Regional Plan Transportation Chapter

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

- Held one Road Foreman Meeting.
- Assisted West Rutland with preparation for small-scale Bicycle and Pedestrian Grants.
- Assisted Rutland City with planning and preparation for Transportation Alternatives Grants and assisted Fair Haven with revising application to secure additional funds.
- Developed planning study on Merchant's Row crossing, and provided technical support through pilot project phase
- Prepared planning study on improving traffic safety and speeding in Middletown Springs Village Center
- ~~Proved~~ Provided technical assistance for Downtown Transportation Fund and Better Roads
- Provided municipal project management services to Brandon, Proctor, Pittsford, Rutland Town, Pawlet, Rutland City, West Rutland, Tinmouth, Fair Haven, Wallingford, Mendon, and Killington.
- Provided MRGP compliance assistance for all 27 Towns – training on permit requirements and how to use web-based and mobile app tools to manage road erosion inventories.
- Provided mapping, planning, and technical support to the Fair Haven Downtown Pedestrian Improvements Project and conducted two public feedback meetings.

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

- Conducted twenty-two (22) data collection activities for VTrans. (Traffic Counts, Bike Ped Counts, Park and Ride Counts, Sidewalk Inventories, Culvert Inventories.)
- Worked with City of Rutland and VTrans to integrate bicycle facilities into redesign of US-7 & US-4 as part of resurfacing project resulting in installation of bicycle facilities along two corridors identified by VTrans as high priority in Bicycle & Pedestrian Strategic Plan.



- Secured funding and serving as project manager for shared-use path project on US-7 in Rutland Town which will establish bicycle facilities on a corridor designated as medium priority in VTrans Bicycle & Pedestrian Strategic Plan.

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

- Provided primary public education and outreach support for installation of roadway reconfiguration on US-7 and US-4 in Rutland City as part of VTrans resurfacing project.
- Organized and ran series of public meetings and listening sessions around Fair Haven Downtown Revitalization project.
- Held “traffic garden” event to allow young children to learn rules of the road for biking
- Officially formed D&H Rail Trail Council

## **MAPPING**

From helping emergency services plan their optimal route to assisting festivals space out their food trucks the program at the RRPC over the past year has advanced its Geographic Information System (GIS) services, delivering critical support to municipalities, state agencies, and regional groups through enhanced mapping, data analysis, and technical assistance. These services might otherwise be outside the technical abilities or financial means of many of our towns. These efforts have strengthened regional planning, improved infrastructure management, and bolstered community resilience across the region.

- **New Staff Capacity:** In the past year the RRPC added two new staff members with GIS proficiency and provided training for another new staff member to utilize GIS. In the year ahead we look forward to coordinating our efforts including developing office-wide standard operating procedures when developing and delivering GIS solutions.
- **Town and Regional Planning:** Our GIS team collaborated with multiple towns, including Brandon, Wells, Rutland Town, Shrewsbury, Hubbardton, Middletown Springs, Wallingford, Danby, Poultney, Fair Haven, and Killington to create and update municipal plans and zoning maps. This year, we introduced advanced geospatial analysis techniques to enhance the accuracy and usability of these maps, providing towns with robust tools for informed decision-making. Notably, we developed detailed Village Center Designation maps for Wells and East Poultney, supporting economic revitalization and community planning. Our ongoing flood hazard mapping and inventories, coupled with grant-related maps, have been instrumental in advancing flood resilience initiatives across the region.
- **Transportation Mapping:** The RRPC GIS team provided extensive mapping support for transportation-related projects and grant applications across Clarendon, Fair Haven, Ira, West Rutland, Pawlet, Poultney, and Castleton. The Sidewalk Inventory Survey Tool we

developed last year for the Rutland Region, which facilitated the comprehensive mapping of sidewalks in Rutland City, Rutland Town, Brandon, Pittsford, Wallingford, Castleton, Fair Haven, and Poultney was used as a reference for developing initiatives in other counties.

- **State Rail Trail Program Assistance:** The RRPC provided vital input and guidance for the development of new GIS solutions to assist, promote and manage the growth of the Statewide Rail Trail Program. These contributions included working with consultants, other RPCs, and the Program administration to produce new basemaps and standards for kiosk maps, a new interactive map product for promoting the trails, and developing the Rail-Trail Friendly business program.
- **Emergency Management:** In alignment with ongoing emergency management planning efforts, our GIS team developed potential Local Hazard Vulnerability maps for several towns to enhance their Local Hazard Management Plans. These maps incorporate the latest data on flood zones, critical infrastructure, and vulnerable populations, providing towns with valuable resources to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of natural disasters. We also began offering bespoke town maps at the request of emergency services for the towns of Middletown Springs and Killington and are currently developing a similar map for Wallingford Rescue Squad.
- **Resiliency Support:** RRPC has been at the forefront of advancing resiliency planning by providing towns with updated maps of special flood hazard areas, river corridors, and site-specific flood hazards. Our work has enabled municipalities to better understand their risk profiles and implement targeted strategies to safeguard their communities against future hazards.
- **Energy Plans:** Our GIS team continued to support regional energy planning by developing detailed maps and acreage assessments for potential renewable energy sites. This year, we focused on integrating new data sources and spatial analysis techniques to identify high-priority areas for solar, wind, and other renewable energy installations, aligning with state energy goals and promoting sustainable development across the region.

## ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING

Administration of the RRPC's programs, policies, and finances continue to be managed effectively and efficiently. Highlights include:

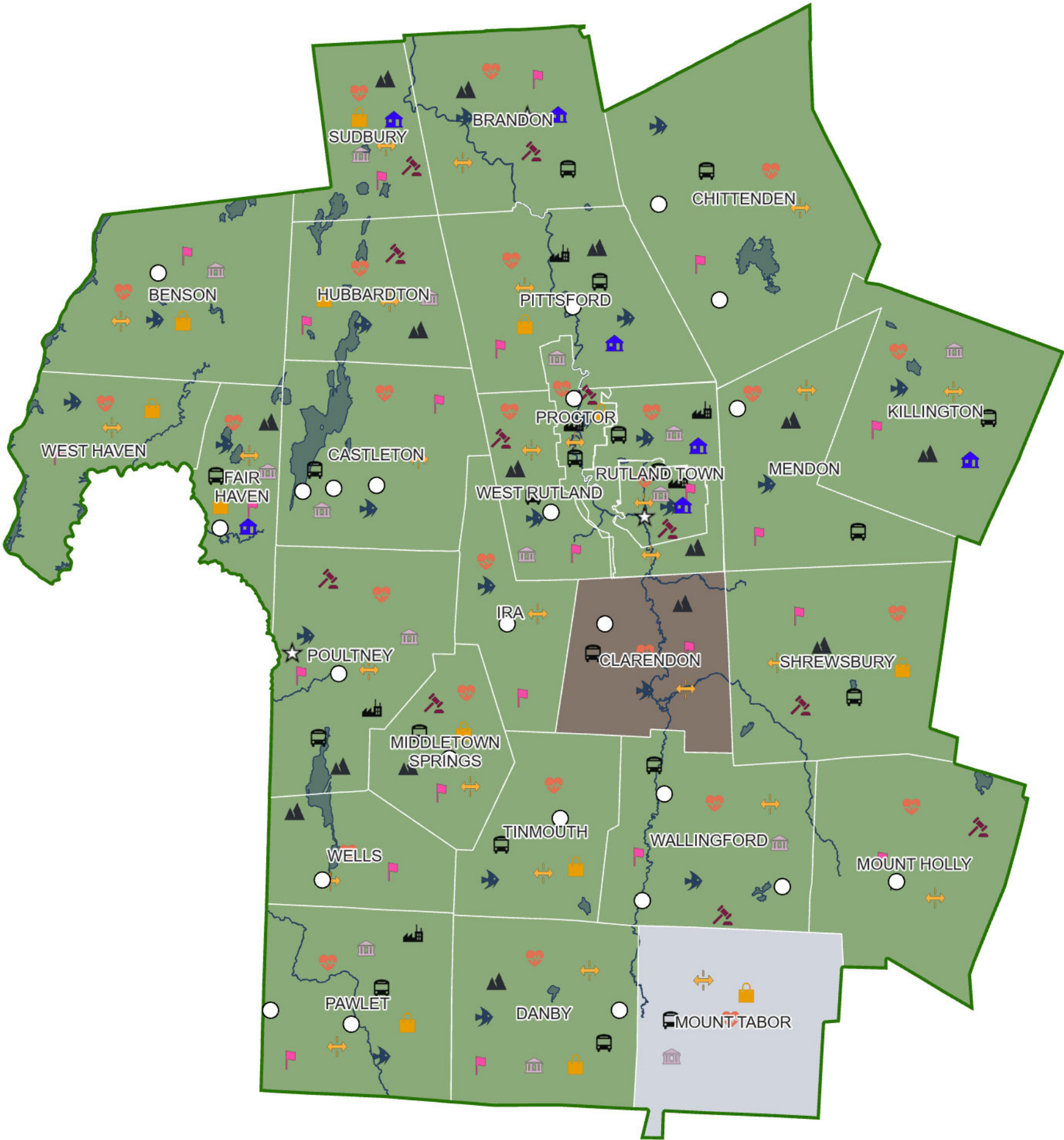
- RRPC is funded by performance and project contracts with federal, state, and local levels of government, organizations, and member municipalities with a budget of over \$2 million, including base funding from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD).

- Successful completion of FY24 Financial and Final Reports, as well as semi-annual reports for ACCD; that included the status of performance measures, budget expenses, and other information.
- Leveraged ACCD funds to provide match and/or direct expenses for grants and agreements from VTrans, VT Dept. of Public Safety, VT Dept. of Health, and EPA as well as MPG and economic development work which enabled RRPC to cover costs incurred to expand work into diverse areas of planning.
- Completed FY23 Audit which resulted in no significant findings, material weaknesses, nor questioned costs were identified.
- Completed significant updates to the RRPC Bylaws, Employee Handbook, and Financial Policies to enhance planning services, increase organizational transparency, and improve employee recruitment and retention.
- Continued diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by utilizing engagement strategies from the Plan 2026 in other planning efforts/initiatives.
- Continued to serve as the lead RPC administering the ARPA and WQ 604b agreements for the other ten RPCs.
- Continued to develop our internship program through two internships from a Master's student at Vermont Law School and a Bachelor's student from Vermont State University at Castleton.
- Overhauled the staff evaluation process and procedure, including a self-evaluation criteria.

## **‘AT WORK’ MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the RRPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Rutland Regional Planning Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

### Designation

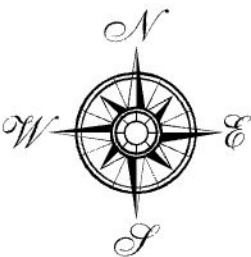
- ☆ Designated Downtown
- Designated Village
- Designated Growth Center
- △ Neighborhood Development Area

### Projects

- ◇ New Town Center
- Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation

- Clean Water
- Emergency Planning & Response
- Planning and Zoning Assistance
- Mapping
- Economic Development
- Grant Writing

- Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities
- Housing
- Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**
- Current
- Expired
- No Town Plan



# **TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION**

## **FY 2024 Annual Report**

The Two Rivers-Ottawuechee 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.

### **PLANNING AND ZONING**

TRORC has a staff with more than 104 years of combined 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 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 in core areas. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the TRORC At Work map. Highlights include:

- TRORC provided technical assistance to 10 towns related to Town Plan language.
  - Sharon, Braintree, Stockbridge, Barnard, Bradford, Brookfield, Chelsea, Newbury, and West Fairlee, and Topsham.
- TRORC provided technical assistance to 15 towns related to bylaws.
  - Thetford, Strafford, Hartford, Woodstock, Bethel, Rochester, Randolph, Plymouth, Chelsea, Corinth, West Fairlee, Braintree, Barnard, Granville, and Royalton.
  - TRORC hosted four training events on data and mapping in the planning process, training for planning commissions, introduction to accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and grants 101.

TRORC also 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.

- Regional Plan Implementation: 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, a few 248 applications were received, primarily for solar installations, and a few 248a applications for larger cell towers associated with

FirstNet. None had major issues. A few ongoing Act 250 permits were followed, and TRORC retained counsel to file comments on a large commercial proposal in Hartland.

- 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. TRORC continues to raise awareness and support local groups on housing needs. TRORC is a key partner of the Hartford 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](http://www.keystothevalley.com).

## **BROWNFIELDS**

TRORC has sought and been awarded 2 million 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 24, TRORC used a combination of EPA and state brownfields funding to carry forward assessment work on sites in Fairlee, Rochester, Bradford, and Hartford.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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

- TRORC continues to support the Cornerstone Creative Community of Vermont (3CVT) through the Zone Agent, implementing projects related to the creative economy. Through this effort, TRORC serves as the RPC representative on the statewide Vermont Creative Network. TRORC supported creative individuals and businesses in the East Central Vermont Economic Development District (ECVEDD), with major funding from an EDA grant.
- TRORC closed out the EDA grant with a film series on education and immigration in White River Junction and Randolph. These events reached over 1,200 people and brought local and out of state tourism to the region's towns and businesses. The July event in Randolph was fifth in a series of cross-sector events with regional partners to host events that combined the Creative Economy with Outdoor Recreation, Education, Health & Wellness, and Agriculture.

- TRORC continues participation in Vermont Arts Council Steering Team meetings, provides updates to the 3CVT steering committee, and monitors a community discussion email list and Facebook page for creatives.
- TRORC continues to collaborate with the ECVEDD on implementation of the goals, strategies, and actions of our federally approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- TRORC closed the year with the Creative Sector Convening in Bellows Falls, supporting a two-day event that included Historic Preservation with over 200 attendees.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

TRORC participates in the VTrans' Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI), supporting local Selectboards and Road Foremen. Our work enables towns to get state and federal grants, manage local projects, and keeps 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 mean that the region's road crews interact, are knowledgeable, and are supported during emergencies. This work has been especially important this year with local 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).
  - Provided feedback for the US Route 5 bike corridor municipal survey.
- ***Other Outreach***
  - 1 road foreman meeting, Public Transit O&D meetings (3 meetings), 5 VTrans local community questionnaires (Royalton BR30, Bridgewater BR26, Hartford BR73, Hartland BR57, Bradford BR91), Royalton BR30 with sudden closure, Royalton VT14 RR bridge

- **Data collection the RPCs conduct for VTrans**

- 60 P&R (20 sites, three times per year), 19 town Complete Streets forms, 25 traffic counts, 7 bike ped count locations, 2 sidewalks, 4 culvert inventories (Wells River, Tunbridge, Randolph, Bethel)

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

- Participated in Project Development Activities: Two project scoping efforts
- Participated in Act 250 review related to transportation issues: Sunnymede Farms in Hartland
- Operated as Municipal Project Managers for towns awarded federal transportation grants:
  - Bridgewater - Sand Shed
  - Hartland - 3 Corners Intersection Sidewalk
  - Royalton - Chelsea Business Block Sidewalk
  - Bethel - Pleasant St Sidewalk
  - Tunbridge - Village Scoping Study
  - Sharon - Village Scoping Study
- Hosted the 2024 VTrans O&D Summit
- Provided disaster support to towns and VTrans from the July and December 2023 floods.
- Coordinated with VTrans, Rochester and Hartford on their Safe Routes to School grant awards.
- Participated in the FHWA Technical Oversight Working Group - Local Rural Roads Safety Manual.

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

- **Other Better Roads (BR) related work**
  - 20 grant applications; Road Erosion Inventory (REI) Better Roads (8), Bike Ped (3), Transportation Alternatives Program (2), District Structures/Roadways (6), Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD) Downtown Transportation Fund (1).
- **Participation in public transit efforts**
  - TRORC staff continued participation in 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 Road Foreman staff and town Administrative Assistants in last 3 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, and most recently advocating to VTrans for grant extensions for towns impacted by the flooding event.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING AND RESPONSE**

TRORC plays key roles in the mitigation, preparedness, and recovery phases of local emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. TRORC supports our 30 municipalities in updates to their Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs). LEMPs are critical documents that the state and others use to contact towns in disasters and contain information that communities use for their own emergency actions. TRORC provides direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center during times of disaster, assists in floodplain bylaws updates, writes FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, and assists communities in accessing grant funds. TRORC staff support a Regional Emergency Management Committee that is a venue for the region's responder and emergency managers to meet.

TRORC staff are trained and ready to 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 this role three times between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024. TRORC has an excellent working relationship with our VTrans Districts, river engineers, and road foremen, coordinating with them in times when road damages are expected.

Severe flooding began to impact the region on July 4, 2023, though this was localized to Bridgewater. Thereafter, damaging storms struck on July 7, and on July 10, a more severe and widespread storm struck larger parts of Vermont, rivalling the impact of Tropical Storm Irene. TRORC staff worked at the State Emergency Operations Center, coordinated with VTrans, and conducted field assessments of town road damage, augmenting local road crew efforts. We worked with local zoning administrators on flood repair permitting as needed. Staff spent considerable time helping communities and residents report damage, and then access FEMA funding.

The TRORC website has a flood page with helpful resources, which was added after the July 2023 storms. TRORC shared its past expertise on flood buyouts with several agencies and the media. Subsequently, TRORC was asked to lead a flood damage reduction grant development program known as RIVER. The program aims to collaborate with nine hard hit communities across Vermont in the development of grant application materials to seek funding from FEMA. Learn more about the RIVER program at: [www.riverprojectsvt.org](http://www.riverprojectsvt.org).

## **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:

- Produced custom maps for town requests (energy, watershed/natural resource, forest blocks, road name, infrastructure atlases etc.).
- Managed ArcGIS Online portal with several custom web maps (energy, regional plan, flooding).
- Updated town plan maps and zoning maps.
- Supported town asset inventories (culvert, road erosion).
- Supported parcel mapping with town outreach.
- Uploaded updated town zoning layers to the Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI) portal.
- Completed Hazard Mitigation Plan analysis and maps.
- Act 174 renewable energy generation maps.

## **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. 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.

Current SEC projects include:

- Applying for and implementing grants for EV charging
- Planning and implementing energy-efficiency retrofits of public buildings
- Providing policy recommendations for amendments to local zoning codes and procurement policies to allow for smart growth and ensure that internal-combustion equipment is gradually replaced with electric alternatives.

This year, TRORC continued its work on the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP) and worked with all towns in our region to access the program's mini-grants, oversee state funded energy assessments of town buildings, and gather building documentation to apply for energy efficiency and weatherization grants available through the MERP. TRORC assisted 20 towns in applying for mini-grants of \$4,000 each and all 30 towns in applying for energy assessments of their

public buildings. Twenty-three TRORC towns have had their energy assessment site visits and the remaining seven are to be scheduled soon.

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.

## **CLEAN WATER**

TRORC works 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 have supported the implementation of water quality initiatives. TRORC coordinated with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) on recovery and project scoping after the July 2023 floods. TRORC works with towns to identify infrastructure and properties vulnerable to flooding and/or fluvial erosion and supports local Flood Bylaw administration with our in-house Certified Flood Managers. TRORC supported FEMA remapping in the White River, Ompompanoosuc, Waits, Wells, and Ottauquechee River Watersheds.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- TRORC has continued to partner with the Mt. Ascutney Prevention Partnership (MAPP) in working with communities on policies that focus on healthy communities. TRORC also continues to share our health chapter template with local planning commissions, selectboards, and other Upper Valley health groups. Though not required by statute, TRORC has a health chapter in our Regional Plan.
- TRORC continued to provide support to communities on the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

## **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 24 budget was approximately \$3.3 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 complements and furthers the work of TRORC by being able to access philanthropic funding.

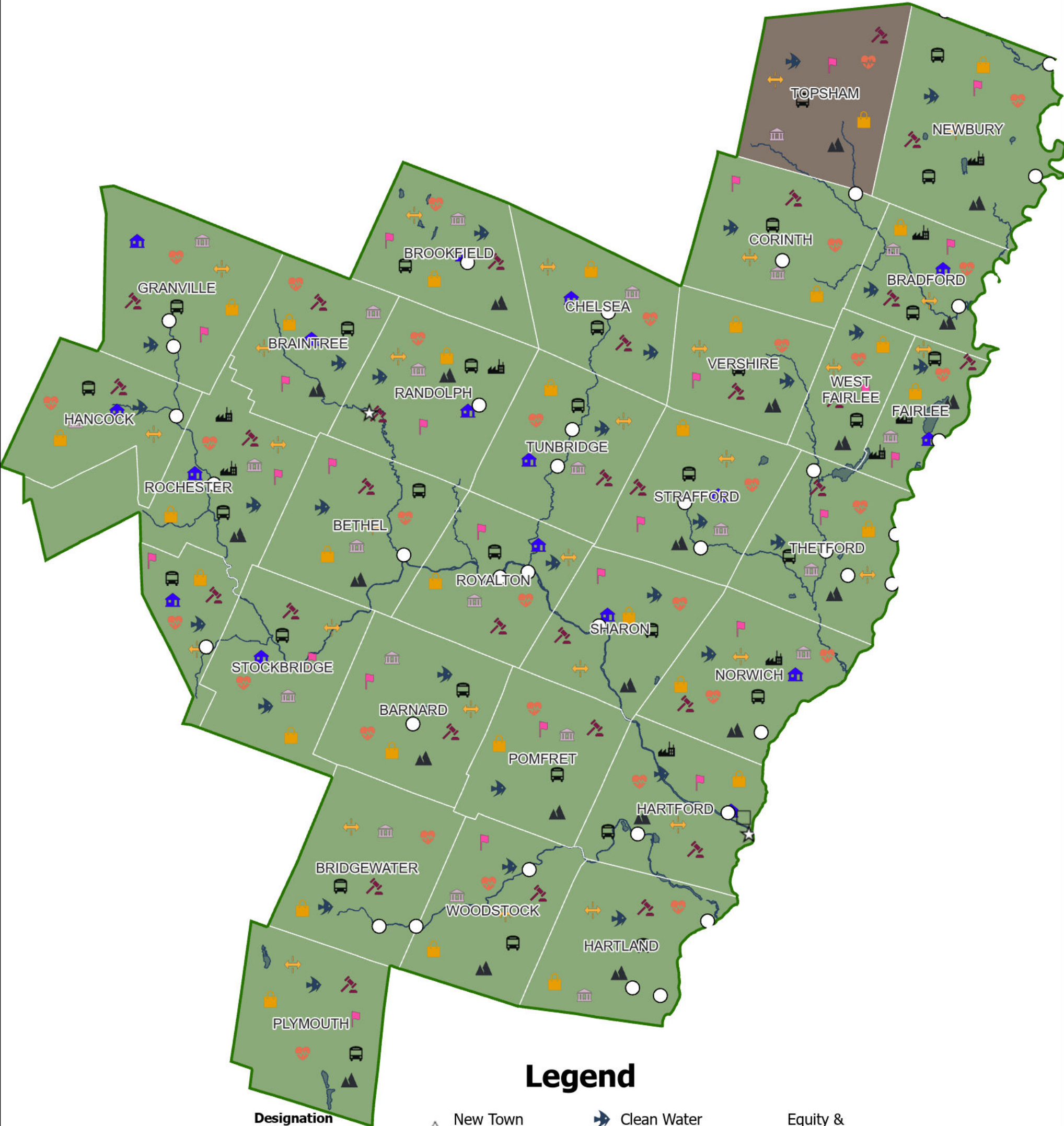
TRORC always has a Single Audit conducted by an independent Certified Public Accounting firm and has numerous field audits and reviews by funders. No significant findings, material weaknesses, nor questioned costs were identified this year. Staff continuously avail themselves of professional development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

TRORC serves 30 municipalities and operates with a Board of Directors that develop and implement policy and oversee a staff of 13. The Board systematically updates all accounting practices and safeguards and organizational policies on an ongoing basis.

### **‘AT WORK’ MAP**

The map depicting the range of services provided by the TRORC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission at Work FY 2024



## Legend

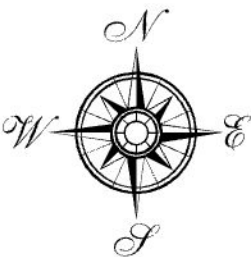
**Designation**

- ☆ Designated Downtown
- Designated Village
- Designated Growth Center
- △ Neighborhood Development Area

**Projects**

- ◇ New Town Center
- Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation
- Clean Water
- Emergency Planning & Response
- Planning and Zoning Assistance
- Mapping
- Economic Development
- Grant Writing

- Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities
- Housing
- Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**
- Current
- Expired
- No Town Plan



# WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION

## FY 2024 Annual Report

Celebrating our 59<sup>th</sup> year, the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) is an important resource to 27 towns in southeast Vermont, including all of the towns of Windham County, the towns of Readsboro, Searsburg, and Winhall in Bennington County, and the town of Weston in Windsor County. In the absence of county government, we are an essential link between local, state, and federal government. Our mission is to assist towns in Southeastern Vermont to provide effective local governance and work collaboratively with them to address regional issues.

Each town's Selectboard determines who will represent the town on the WRC. Each member town can appoint two [commissioners](#) who represent that town's interest in regional affairs. The exception is Somerset, where a town supervisor is appointed by the Governor. Additionally, the WRC has up to 9 citizen interest [commissioners](#) who represent other regional interests such as business and industry, healthy communities, agriculture, natural resources, energy, and housing. The WRC is organized around a strong committee structure. These [committees](#) are where most of the work gets done and the decisions made. Commissioners serve on these committees and make the decisions. The WRC has 12 highly-qualified [staff](#) who provide support to the committees, and execute the Commission's [program of work](#).

### PLANNING & ZONING

RPCs act as a cost-effective professional planning and plan implementation staff in support of many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education, municipal consultation, bylaw modernization, and implementing new requirements for housing, flood resiliency, forest blocks and habitat connectivity, energy, and water quality planning. Clear and up-to-date plans and bylaws are essential to smooth state and local permitting. We also recognize that local planning and zoning administration capacity seems to be diminishing, and that intermunicipal approaches may be not only desirable but necessary.

RPCs also coordinate planning at the regional level through the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive regional plan, and related plans and studies, such as the regional energy plan and regional transportation plan. These plans guide local planning and the investment decisions of the public and private sectors. RPC's planning and zoning work is supported through local and regional planning funds, local contributions, and other grants. The technical assistance and regional planning provided this year is shown on the At Work map; some highlights were:

- Provided general assistance to towns in updating and adopting town plans (14 towns) and land use regulations (9 towns). Updating town plans included assisting towns with



addressing Act 174 enhanced energy planning standards, Act 171 planning standards for protection of forest blocks and habitat connectors, planning for housing needs, addressing flood resiliency, providing updated town plan maps and community data, and responding to general procedural and statute questions. Updating bylaws involved assisting towns with amendments to increase housing opportunities, updating flood hazard area regulations, including protection of river corridors, and administration and enforcement of such regulations.

- Provided general technical assistance to towns on topics including Chapter 117 statutory processes and requirements, Act 171 (forest blocks and habitat connectors), Act 174 (energy planning), HOME Act (municipal zoning reforms to encourage housing), and general administration and enforcement of land use regulations.
- Worked with one town on a new Village Center designation application. Consulted with several communities going through the renewal process for existing State designated areas.
- Hosted a virtual regional training on Basics of Land Use Planning and Regulation. Provided customized presentations for Planning Commissions and others (e.g., Selectboard and Zoning Board of Adjustment or Development Review Board members), as requested.
- Hosted an in-person Windham Region Planners Roundtable discussion with funding support from the Vermont Planners Association for Zoning Administrators, Town Planners, and Planning Commission, ZBA, and DRB members.
- Conducted 4 municipal consultations with town Planning Commissions to discuss town planning, regional planning commission review and approval of town plans and confirmation of towns' planning processes, and regional commission programs and assistance to towns.
- Assisted 4 towns in developing and submitting Municipal Planning Grants and Bylaw Modernization Grants. Two of these Municipal Planning Grant applications were funded.
- Assisted the towns of Brattleboro, Rockingham, and Wilmington on a successful Municipal Planning Grant consortium application for the completion of a Windham Region Cultural Plan that will identify arts and cultural assets and their economic impact, and provide set of goals and action step to ensure the continued strength of the creative sector.
- WRC contracted with the towns of Dover, Weston, Winhall, Jamaica, and Townshend to work on Town Plan updates. WRC also worked with the town of Athens on developing the town's first Town Plan. Several of these communities received funding through the Municipal Planning Grant program to complete these projects over the last two funding cycles.
- WRC was contracted by the towns of Wilmington and Newfane to make recommendations on updates to zoning bylaws to support additional housing opportunities with funds the communities received through the Bylaw Modernization Grant program.
- Worked with the towns of Londonderry and Grafton to provide project coordination services and community engagement for Village Wastewater and Water Supply grants.

- Continued to work with towns to advise them on use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and annual reporting requirements.
- WRC continued to work on updating the Windham Regional Plan. The plan will focus on how to support compact development in our village centers and downtown areas, how to make settlements more climate adaptive and resilient, and how to maintain and improve habitat connectivity within the region. The update process will take approximately two years with the goal of adopting a final plan in spring/summer 2025. The updated regional plan will be entirely web-based and the WRC has hired a consultant to assist with the design and development of the website that will host the plan. The purpose behind this is to provide communities with a more accessible and useful planning tool and source of information.
- Project Review - During this reporting period the WRC reviewed four Act 250 applications and one Section 248 applications (solar project). Act 250 applications included those related to the Mount Snow Resort, the Putney Boat House on the Connecticut River in Putney, and heating system upgrades to the Rockingham Health Center in Bellows Falls.
- WRC is following the decommissioning and site restoration of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station and actively participating as a member of the Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Citizen Advisory Panel.

## BROWNFIELDS

- The WRC [brownfields program](#), since its inception in 2000, has brought a total of \$7.7 million dollars in federal brownfields funds to the region for assessment and cleanup of brownfields sites. In 2023/2024, we received an additional \$100,000 in assessment funds from the state.
- Participated in the Revitalizing New England: Brownfields Summit 2024.
- During this past year WRC Brownfields program has worked on the following sites:

Site	Town/Village	Brownfields Work	Reuse plan
0 Bridge St.	Bellows Falls	Phase I complete and Phase II underway.	New multi-family housing
130 Birge St.	Brattleboro	SSDS assessment complete.	Redevelopment of historic structure for immigrant housing.
485 West River Rd.	Brattleboro	Soil gas sampling.	Continued commercial use.
Adams Grist Mill	Bellows Falls	Phase I complete and Phase II underway.	Continued use as museum.
Bellows Falls Bike Project	Bellows Falls	ECAA/CAP additional testing complete.	Nonprofit Bike Project plans to purchase site for continued use.



Bellows Falls Train Station	Bellows Falls	Vapor Intrusion CAP and sampling underway. Awaiting property transfer before cleanup can begin.	Plan to continue to use the building as a train and bus station with the addition of a café or brewery.
BMAC/11 Arch St.	Brattleboro	Historic documentation complete.	Cleaned up site in preparation of BMAC potential expansion.
Brattleboro Basketville	Brattleboro	SSDS assessment complete.	Continued use as affordable housing and WWHT office space.
CF Church	Brattleboro	ECAA/CAP and pilot testing.	Continued commercial use.
Foodworks	Brattleboro	Phase I complete and Phase II underway.	Nonprofit Groundworks plans to purchase site for continued use as food shelf.
The Garage	Bellows Falls	Offsite vapor plume delineation underway.	Affordable housing constructed.
McNeill's Brewery	Brattleboro	Phase I complete and Phase II underway.	Potentially affordable housing.
NEYT Arts Campus - 48/64 Elm St.	Brattleboro	Cleanup complete.	Redevelopment by New England Youth Theatre for additional outdoor space.
Penta/Wyman Flint	Bellows Falls	CAP development underway.	Plan to redevelop site for CT River Heritage Center.
S. Newfane Store	Newfane	Phase I complete and Phase II underway.	Restore greenspace as part of FEMA buyout.
Thermal House	Brattleboro	Hazardous Building Materials Assessment, CAP and Pilot testing complete.	Redevelopment for maple syrup warehouse and distribution facility.
TLR		CAP and pilot testing underway.	Plan to redevelop site for CT River Heritage Center.
Winston Prouty	Brattleboro	Phase II underway.	Plan to develop site for new housing.
WW Building Supply	Wilmington	Phase I and Phase II complete.	Prospective purchaser, WheelPad, plans to use site to assemble accessible mobile units.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning. RPCs work with towns and in strong partnership with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs)

to this end in a number of ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help position Vermont for long-term economic gain.

- Engaged in the creation of the U.S. Economic Development Administration-recognized Southern Vermont Economic District.
- Participated on Southeastern Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) Board and the development of the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone. Also active on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update Committee.
- Participated on the Welcoming Communities Challenge Project led by the Brattleboro Development Credit Corp. and funded by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.
- Participated on the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance Executive Committee.
- Participated on the Southeastern Vermont Housing Coalition and Planning Committee.
- Working with Winston Prouty Center, located on the former Austine School for the Deaf campus in Brattleboro, in a community planning effort to explore the development of a new neighborhood that could host 300-500 new homes.
- Continuing to provide support to towns as they deliberate on the needs and potential benefits of community water and wastewater systems. Working directly with the towns of Londonderry and Grafton in support of their wastewater grants.
- Active at the state level in advocacy for state support for community water and wastewater systems in order to retain existing homes and businesses in villages and to make compact settlement possible per state, regional, and municipal policy.
- Continue to assist Windham Region communities with village center and downtown designation applications.
- Participated in the Windham Regional Healthy Seniors project, designed to consider the future of senior living in the region.
- Continue to participate on the Windham County Economic Development Program Committee.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

Through contract with the VTrans, RPCs coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the 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 following five categories are performance measures reported to VTrans as part of their report to the legislature.

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

- Held 5 TAC meetings. Engaged 9 non-municipal TAC members actively in transportation planning.
- Actively engaged 26 municipalities in transportation planning.
- Coordinated 17 RPC activities with municipalities and VTrans.

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

- Regional transportation plan is current (within 8 years).
- Coordinated 3 activities in support of regional public transit providers.
- Staff participated on 1 VTrans committee.

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

- Assisted 9 municipalities with transportation-related grants.
- Spent 67% of budget on municipal technical assistance.
- Conducted 7 municipal transportation inventories.
- Assisted 6 municipalities with transportation element of municipal/town plan.
- Conducted 1 road erosion inventories in support of the municipal road general permit using TPI dollars and other funding sources.
- Serving as Municipal Project Manager (not using TPI funds) for the Spring Hill Road replacement project in Londonderry, the Wardsboro Sheldon Hill Road Flood Resiliency scoping study, the Athens Ober Hill Road Flood Resiliency Scoping Study, the Rockingham Atkinson Street and School Street intersection improvement Scoping Study, the Route 121 culvert replacement project in Windham, and the Grout Pond Road improvement project in Stratton.

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

- Performed 72 data collection activities specifically for VTrans.

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

- Participated in conjunction with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission, NHDOT and the towns of Brattleboro and Hinsdale, NH for the development of a vision for future use of the existing Fort Hill Rail Bridge as a bicycle and pedestrian connection across the Connecticut River.
- Coordinated with FRCOG and Windham Region Legislators on support for the Shell Bridge Bicycle and Pedestrian conversation project in neighboring Northfield, MA

- Together with Mt. Ascutney Regional Commission and Southeast Vermont Transit, continued to support our regional Elders and Persons with Disabilities Transportation program to provide on demand transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities to medical appointments, shopping, meals, and social engagements.
- Participated and publicized the ongoing MassDOT Northern Tier Passenger Rail Greenfield-Boston study, including coordinating with Windham Region Legislators.
- Facilitated the transition of the Windham Regional Transportation Committee to a Transportation Advisory Committee.
- WRC serves on the board of Southeast Vermont Transit.
- Facilitated conversations between towns, VTrans and RPCs around Vermont regarding the increasing costs of aggregate for town highways.
- Worked with VTrans and Windham Region towns regarding the Route 5 Bicycle Corridor Survey.

## Highlights

- WRC continues to support the road foremen in the region. One aspect of this support is loading data and apps onto tablets for use by highway departments, and providing training to a number of towns on the use of technology for town highway work.
- GIS staff spent a great deal of time in support of the Municipal Roads Grants in Aid program, working with nearly all our towns on their construction projects that bring road segments into compliance for the Municipal Roads General Permit.
- WRC coordinated with VTrans and Windham Region towns on the Route 5 Bicycle Corridor survey.
- The ongoing Bellows Falls Riverfront Trail project will extend the existing riverfront pathway in Bellows Falls from the current endpoint along Mill Street approximately ½ mile south to Paper Mill Road. This will create a dedicated pedestrian connection to downtown for residents at the southern end of the village as well as improve access to the Connecticut River waterfront. The WRC serves as the project manager on this project.
- The WRC continues to coordinate with our interstate neighbors in Massachusetts and New Hampshire on a variety of projects, working together with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (NH) and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (MA) to improve regional transportation links. These include the redevelopment of the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Existing 119 Bridges and Island Complex, the Fort Hill Rail Bridge redevelopment, the Shell Bridge Redevelopment, the Connecticut River/Route 5 Bikeway as well as various initiatives to improve bus and passenger rail transit.
- WRC serves as the Municipal Project Manager for the Spring Hill Road replacement project in Londonderry, the Wardsboro Sheldon Hill Road Flood Resiliency scoping study, the Athens Ober Hill Road Flood Resiliency Scoping Study, the Rockingham Atkinson Street and School Street intersection improvement Scoping Study, the Route 121 culvert

replacement project in Windham, and the Grout Pond Road improvement project in Stratton.

- The WRC worked with the Southern Vermont's smallest town, Searsburg, on an application to the Municipal Technical Assistance Program to address flooding issues related to an undersized culvert on Sleepy Hollow Road and is serving as the project manager for this project.
- The Windham Regional Commission assisted 9 towns as well as Southeast Vermont Transit in applying for grants from different transportation related grant programs, including Transportation Alternatives and Municipal Highway and Stormwater Mitigation grants for Brattleboro, Athens, Guilford and Grafton, Better Roads grants for Halifax, Athens, Dummerston, Wilmington, Grafton and Guilford, Bicycle and Pedestrian grants for Brattleboro, Newfane and Guilford, a Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative grant for Wilmington and a Municipal Technical Assistance Grant for Searsburg.

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE**

RPCs play a key role in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VTrans, and the Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs also help update floodplain bylaws and hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans, and serve as local liaisons between towns and the State Emergency Operations Center in hazard events like the July 2023 flooding and the Covid-19 pandemic.

- WRC's Executive Director coordinates closely with VEM through his role as the Chair of the Emergency Planning Committee of VAPDA.
- WRC's Emergency Planner served as the Regional Planning Commission Representative on the Steering Committee for the recently completed update of the State Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Preparations, training outreach, and information sharing underway with towns regarding the fall 2024 statewide catastrophic exercise 5, Binary Blizzard.
- Currently working with interested towns on updating of flood hazard bylaws in conjunction with new FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps expected in 2027.
- The WRC develops local hazard mitigation plans for our towns, with the exception of Brattleboro, which maintains its own. A Plan template was developed to expedite future updates.
- Engaged with Jamaica, Londonderry and Weston, three towns in the region hardest hit by the July 2023 flooding, on the RIVER initiative which will result in a set of applications to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.
- Assisted towns with transitioning to WebEOC, Vermont Emergency Management's online dashboard portal, for the annual update of their Local Emergency Management Plans.

- WRC staffs the Regional Emergency Management Committee, which holds quarterly meetings for Emergency Management Directors (EMDs) and others actively involved in emergency management. Topics are chosen by the participating members.
- Following any significant event, WRC serves in a liaison role to collect damage information from towns for VEM to use in determining whether to seek a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration. WRC staff, in conjunction with the regional ANR River Management Engineers and VTrans Districts 1 and 2, have in place a damage reporting/situational awareness protocol that expedites the gathering of accurate information from towns with the goal of minimizing duplicate requests for information. That protocol is kept updated and shared with new staff members that have a liaison support role.
- WRC has an Emergency Planning Committee. The group is available to assist staff with local liaison needs during large events.
- WRC holds and arranges for trainings, exercises and meetings for EMDs and Floodplain Administrators assist in their continued learning and engagement in those local roles.
- WRC maintains a Certified Floodplain Manager on staff who works with interested towns on developing updated flood hazard bylaws which incorporate state-designated river corridors.
- WRC supports the development of grant applications to FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant, and VEM's Flood Resilient Communities Fund. There are several active applications and grant funded projects in the region currently.
- WRC staff participated in numerous FEMA sponsored trainings as part of the State Emergency Operations Center training program.
- Staff attended the annual Vermont Emergency Management conference.

## **MAPPING**

In addition to enhancing the RPC work, RPCs provide municipalities, state agencies, and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects. In many cases the maps you see in town offices and garages were produced by the WRC.

- Mapping support to town planning efforts is at the core of WRC's mapping program. Town plan maps, and corresponding data, were updated for Dover's, Weston's, and Rockingham's town plan (Rockingham's map series consisted of 27 different maps). Village center designation mapping was done for Readsboro and Winhall. Zoning bylaw mapping support was provided to Londonderry.
- With the Windham Regional Plan undergoing an update, staff began the process of updating regional plan maps.
- GIS staff provide extensive support to town highway departments in myriad ways. We've helped ten towns use tablets for mapping and inventory work through training and

developing on-line maps. We developed a suite of maps for Newfane to track hazard trees, and maps for Wilmington's 5-year paving plan. Three well-attended regional road foremen's meetings were held, with the primary topics being road paving, stream alternation permits, and on-line mapping tools.

- GIS staff continues to provide support for transportation-related inventory and mapping work. We worked on culvert inventories and/or maps for Athens, Brookline, and Dummerston, inventoried and photographed large bridges in culverts in eight towns, and began a sidewalk inventory for the region. We continued to provide training and outreach to towns on how to use the VtCulverts tool to both view and manage their culvert data.
- Support for towns as they continue to work on compliance with Vermont's Municipal Roads General Permit has been ongoing, including outreach on the newly revised permit. We worked with both Halifax and Newfane to develop a plan to address compliance on their Very High Priority road segments, and continued to provide assistance to over a dozen towns on their Grants in Aid projects.
- Town road maps, which include all public and private names, road ownership and class, and surface type, have long been provided to towns. This year we updated maps for Westminster, Vernon, Brattleboro, Newfane, Halifax, and Wilmington, and provided the corresponding updated data to Vtrans. We also began working with Vtrans on a project to ensure all roads surface type codes are correct in the state's master road centerline GIS data.
- Continued our effort to study bike parking in downtown Brattleboro, and began in Bellows Falls, by conducting an inventory of bike racks, and on one day each month of bikes parked in the downtown district.
- WRC continues efforts to provide support for our communities regarding trails and recreation paths. We completed a map for the Grafton Village Park, provided mapping support to the Friends of the West River Trail, Green Mountain Conservancy, and Wilmington Trails Committee. We also provided assistance to the Jamaica Area Mountain Bike Alliance and the Retreat Farm, and to the Town of Guilford as they sought to establish a trails committee. WRC's GIS planner participated in the Velomont/Vermont Huts steering committee, providing extensive feedback and review of those organizations' wayfinding plan and vision plan, and is now a board member of the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council.
- WRC provides mapping support to towns and non-profit organizations when they apply for various grants, including VTrans Better Roads Grants (Athens, Grafton, Halifax), Transportation Assistance Program (Rockingham), and Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (Wilmington).
- VtCulverts is Vermont's on-line municipal bridge and culvert data inventory tool. WRC is one of two Regional Planning Commissions that help manage and administer the tool for all RPCs and towns in the state.

- WRC provided feedback to Vtrans on the decennial update to the Federal Highway Administration's Federal Aid Urban Area boundaries.
- Staff often field questions from a variety of individuals and organizations about mapping and GIS data. This year outreach included interacting with faculty and staff at Norwich University and the University of Massachusetts on projects with WRC involving Rock River flooding and Route 30 communities respectively.
- GIS staff led an extensive bicycle and pedestrian count program. We conducted pedestrian counts at 26 locations in five towns (Brattleboro, Dover, Putney, Rockingham, and Wilmington), with some being repeat counts. These counts on sidewalks, multi-use pathways, trails, and at crosswalks. Our counts in Rockingham were a detailed analysis of two different intersections. Bicycle counts on roadways were done at seven count locations in four towns (Brattleboro, Dover, Rockingham, and Wilmington). Staff reflected on lessons learned from ten years of bike and ped counts by presenting on the topic at the Vermont Walk Bike Summit.
- At the request of seven towns (Athens, Dover, Grafton, Guilford, Rockingham, Westminster, and Wilmington), conducted 22 different traffic counts, recording data on vehicle volume, speed, and class.
- Staff created an updated E911 map of Weston, and started working on a map of Dover.

## **ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION**

A renewed focus on clean, renewable, sustainable, and affordable energy presents Vermont with great opportunity and significant challenges. RPCs integrate energy planning with land use, transportation, and natural resources planning, and 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.

- WRC continues to assist municipalities in the Windham Region with the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP, Act 172) that launched in early 2023. Of the eligible municipalities in the Windham Region, 18 received mini-grants to provide energy education and consultation in their communities. 42 municipal buildings received energy audits as a part of this program. Many municipalities will now have the opportunity to complete implementation work on needed energy resiliency projects in municipal buildings.
- The WRC worked with Town Energy Committees throughout the region. Regional Energy Committee gatherings are held to share information and collaborate on common weatherization projects. This regional forum will continue to be a support system for our Energy Committees.
- WRC has been working on updating the Enhanced Energy Plan/Energy Chapter for the Windham Regional Plan. As energy discussions and analysis are happening on a regional



level, WRC continues to support towns with updating their own Energy Chapters in the Town Plan or updating their Enhanced Energy Plans. In the past year, two new towns have begun work on creating an Enhanced Energy Plan for their town.

- WRC collaborated with Green Mountain Power to secure Congressionally Directed Spending through Senator Sanders in support of the creation of electricity resiliency zones. This project will focus on 6 towns identified by Green Mountain Power as having relatively high community risk in the event of power outages. Resiliency zones will use a variety of resilience measures to enable communities to continue to have electrical service in the event of a grid outage. The WRC is working with these towns through a robust public engagement process to identify specific issues and problem areas in order to identify appropriate mitigation measures and is working to create a dialog between towns in order to foster collaboration and continuity in emergency events.

## **CLEAN WATER**

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to implement the state's Clean Water Initiative through basin planning and assistance to municipalities in meeting statutory and regulatory requirements. RPCs also work with municipalities and watershed organizations to implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions. The WRC has gone a step further in organizing community efforts to connect people with their watersheds, and to create watershed "identities."

- Stormwater Master Planning is currently being conducted in four communities in the Windham Region. WRC continues to assist in the development of these plans as input is needed.
- WRC is continuing to work with the Town of Dover, Mount Snow, ANR, the Connecticut River Conservancy and others to remove the Snow Lake impoundment at Mount Snow and restore the natural flow of the north branch of the Deerfield River.
- WRC is working in collaboration with the Town of Rockingham, private businesses, VTrans and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation to address stormwater runoff issues in an industrial zone. This work has led to the identification of three additional stormwater gullies that WRC has begun working with the Town of Rockingham to communicate with landowners and develop stormwater projects to restore the washouts and reduce the effects of stormwater runoff.
- The WRC is concluding its administrative role with the Green River Watershed Alliance with an eye towards transitioning the organization into self-administration. This alliance, with support of the High Meadows Fund and VT DEC Watershed grants, addresses environmental issues, watershed study, place-based education, and ecological restoration within the Green River Watershed. The work of the Alliance highlights the importance of watershed awareness in the Green River watershed for water quality and flood resilience.

- Participated in various collaborative watershed efforts, including:
  - Supported the Deerfield River Watershed Alliance in their efforts to nominate the Deerfield River and its tributaries as a federally designated Wild and Scenic River.
  - Worked with the Green River Watershed Alliance to connect the organization to resources and contacts in the Massachusetts portion of the watershed to begin a united collaboration to promote watershed education and protection throughout the entire watershed.
  - Hosted water quality public meetings in cooperation with Vermont DEC to solicit public input into the drafting of the Basin 12 (Deerfield) Tactical Basin Plan.
  - Worked with the Connecticut River Joint Commission's (CRJC) Wantastiquet Local River Subcommittee to link and represent Connecticut River towns to relevant planning issues along the River. WRC continues to serve on the CRJC Full Commission and serves as an officer on the Vermont Commission.
  - WRC works with the Connecticut River Conservancy and Deerfield Watershed Alliance to promote water monitoring results for major rivers and tributaries throughout the region.
- The WRC is the municipal project manager for 2 salt shed projects and 3 culvert replacement project in the region. These transportation related projects all have significant water quality benefits and advance the goals in our region to have more resilient infrastructure in place that also keeps containments out of the region's waterways.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- WRC worked with 17 towns in the region to apply for access for funding through the Vermont Municipal Technical Assistance Program.
- Working with the University of Vermont through the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships on the mapping of all public/community wastewater systems in Vermont and collecting data on their capacity. The goal is to provide both a high-level and localized picture and of where these systems do and do not exist in order to inform understanding as to where public wastewater-dependent development, such as housing at scale, is possible.
- WRC collaborated with the other RPCs and VDH on a health equity and municipal planning project. This project looked at the connection between health disparities and the built environment, and the role towns can play in addressing these issues. The project included the development of a health equity planning toolkit for municipalities and assisting the town of Rockingham with a sidewalk inventory in the village of Bellows Falls.
- WRC collaborated with Green Mountain Power to secure Congressionally Directed Spending through Senator Sanders in support of the creation of electricity resiliency zones. This project focuses on 6 towns identified by Green Mountain Power as having relatively high community risk in the event of power outages. Resiliency zones will use renewable energy generation and storage to enable communities to continue to have electrical

service in the event of a grid outage. The WRC will work with towns to identify the parameters of these zones and their locations.

- Executive Director Chris Campany provided extensive testimony regarding the risks of development in river corridors, and the challenges municipalities face regulating both flood hazard areas and river corridors, during the 2024 legislative session.
- WRC continues to participate in the Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel, and is currently chairing the panel.
- WRC has led engagement with UMass-Amherst, UVM, the Conway School, and Norwich University to increase awareness of and connections between both the Windham Regional Commission and the state's other regional planning commissions. The goal is to further expand this outreach to other universities in the New England region.
- WRC has participated in the exploration of climate migration to Vermont and New England, and most recently participated in a discussion among experts throughout the nation hosted by UMass-Amherst's Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning program and the Lincoln Institute.
- WRC has led discussion about regional and municipal engagement in large scale landscape conservation and connectivity within Vermont, northern New England, and as part of the bi-national northern Appalachian Staying Connected Initiative. Most recently we participated in the inaugural Northeastern North America Landscape Connectivity Summit held in Montreal as a representative of Vermont's regional planning commissions.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

Virtually all of the WRC's revenue sources are tied to contracts with scopes of work, guidelines, and/or performance measures. This means that the WRC has limited control over how it chooses to use the vast majority of its funding. Funding received through town assessments is the exception, which makes this funding stream particularly important because it gives us the greatest latitude to respond to WRC-identified needs in the region. Town assessments, and the funding received through the WRC's performance contract with the state, are also necessary to provide matching funds required by grantors. The grants we receive enable us to work with our towns on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, brownfields redevelopment, energy, and natural resources. Revenue from virtually all federal and state grantors requires matching funds, and typically non-federal matching funds. Required match ranges from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant). Our budget and work program is available on our [About the WRC page](#) on our website.

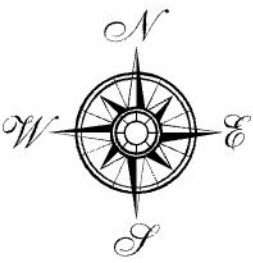
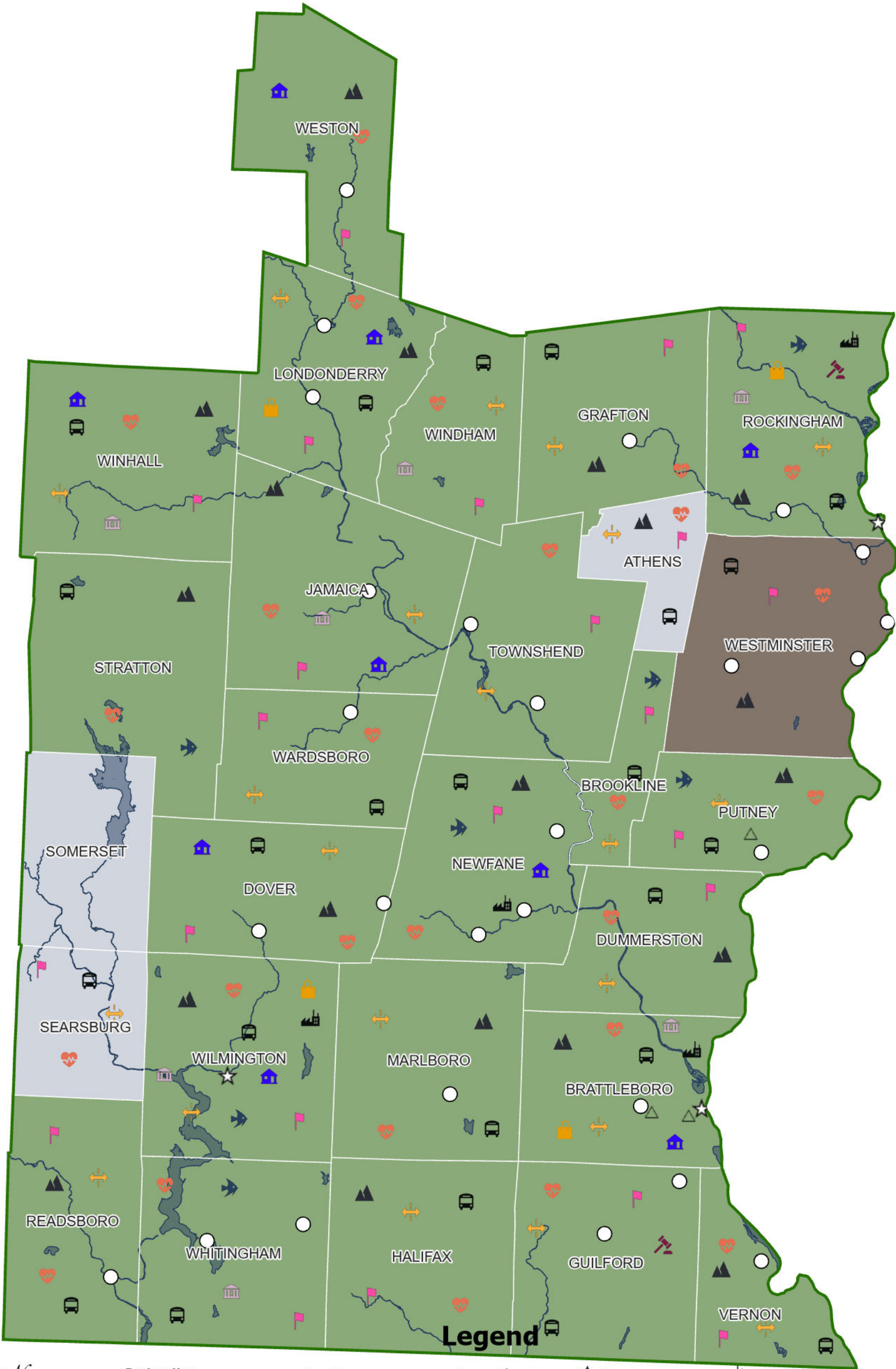
The WRC has an audit on an annual basis, and a single audit as required by Federal rules. Audits and financial statements can be found on the [WRC Finance Committee webpage](#).

The WRC has adopted a [Municipal Services Policy](#) that is intended to provide guidance for the Commission in the delivery of professional services to member municipalities. It describes technical assistance available to member towns as part of the commission's core activities, and the opportunities for expanded service when funded as a special project.

### **‘AT WORK’ MAP**

A map depicting the range of services provided by the WRC to member municipalities is included on the next page.

# Windham Regional Commission at Work FY 2024



- Designation**

  - ★ Designated Downtown
  - Designated Village
  - Designated Growth Center
  - △ Designated Neighborhood Development Area
- Projects**

  - ◇ New Town Center
  - 🚌 Transportation Planning (including Bridge/Culvert, REI & Traffic Counts)
- Energy Planning & Implementation**

  - ↔ Energy Planning & Implementation
  - 💧 Clean Water
  - 🚒 Emergency Planning & Response
  - 🚧 Planning and Zoning Assistance
- Mapping**

  - 🏠 Economic Development
  - 🏢 Grant Writing
  - ⚖️ Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities
  - 🏠 Housing
- Brownfields**

  - 🏭 Brownfields
- Municipal Plan Status**

  - 🟢 Current
  - 🟤 Expired
  - 🟡 No Town Plan