

VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS

Energy Success Stories

Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) are multi-purpose governmental organizations formed by and serving municipalities. RPCs implement a variety of projects and programs tailored to local, regional, and statewide needs. Since 2010, RPCs have managed two ARRA Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant programs. All eleven RPCs received funding through the Vermont Department of Public Service Clean Energy Development Fund. In addition, eight RPCs received direct funding through the U.S. Department of Energy. Initial program successes as of January 2011 include:

ENERGY AUDITS

RPC energy audit programs assess municipal building energy efficiency, target small implementation measures, and estimate energy benefits for each measure. *Windham Regional Commission* completed 16 energy audits on town buildings, schools, fire houses, and a nature museum. Retrofit work on one project is under contract, and on three more is in the bidding process. Two additional retrofit projects will be completed by June 30, 2011.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY RETROFITS

RPCs instituted municipal building retrofit programs, based on retrofit recommendations from certified energy auditors. Working with Efficiency Vermont, RPCs leveraged additional funds through available incentive programs. *Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission* supported a three-town library retrofit that improved insulation, restored and weatherized windows, and upgraded HVAC systems. Jericho Town Library Trustee Ingrid Malmgrem remarked, "The building is definitely warmer ...especially the children's library which was always freezing..."

PUBLIC EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Three RPCs have organized regional energy expos. *Northeastern Vermont Development Association's* NEK Energy Expo brings exhibitors, experts, homeowners, and businesses together. Public interest in weatherization and residential energy efficiency improvements remained high in 2010. Most RPCs have developed or updated their websites with ARRA-funded energy program information and other information used by local and regional energy committees.

ENERGY ACTION COMMITTEES

RPCs established Regional Energy Committees or roundtables for local energy committee members in coordination with the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN). The meetings enable peer-to-peer learning. Attendees share ideas and discuss opportunities and challenges. *Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's* roundtable brings towns and energy committees together for common projects. East Montpelier, Marshfield, and Plainfield campaigned for extending the Route 2 commuter shuttle from Montpelier to St. Johnsbury. Ridership is 70% above projections.

WORKFORCE TRAINING

Northwest Regional Planning Commission transferred funds to the Grand Isle Workforce Investment Board (WIB). The WIB conducted five trainings serving 49 current and prospective contractor employees who wanted to provide energy efficiency services.

HOME ENERGY IMPROVEMENTS

RPCs are assisting local energy coordinators to organize volunteers to perform free home energy visits. *Rutland Regional Planning Commission* assisted coordinators in fifteen towns to organize more than a hundred volunteers. These volunteers performed two hundred free home energy visits. Conducted in partnership with Efficiency Vermont, the visits provided energy efficient lightbulbs, low-flow showerheads, and other devices to reduce family energy costs. The project also identified homes that are ideal candidates for energy audits and efficiency retrofits.

SUPPORTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Bennington County Regional Commission worked with Bennington County Industrial Corporation and businesses in its “composite cluster” to develop programs that support sector expansion. Composite manufacturing integrates energy-saving lightweight components into vehicles aircraft.

REGIONAL/TOWN PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION

RPCs are updating energy components of Regional Plans and assisting municipalities with Municipal Plan updates. This work focuses on providing energy resources analysis and policy statements that work to conserve energy. It:

- Identifies tools and creates incentives to decrease energy use;
- Links energy with transportation, land use, utilities, agricultural use, and other factors to develop a comprehensive strategy that advances efficiency and conservation; and
- Establishes clear goals and tangible projects that create local resiliency and achieve energy savings/efficiencies over time.

RPCs are working to assist towns to implement energy policies through land use regulations or building codes. *Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission* is developing model language that can be used throughout the state to create long-term energy savings through municipal regulatory procedures.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGIES & NEW GENERATION

RPCs are working to encourage alternative energy development and new generation. Working with local utilities, *Lamoille County Planning Commission* is nearing completion of a county wide feasibility study aimed at siting

combined heat and power (CHP) facilities. The study identifies developed areas that could support a CHP facility as well as locations that may be feasible as new development occurs.

ENCOURAGING TRANSPORTATION CHANGES

RPCs are promoting Vermont’s Way to Go and/or Safe Routes to School initiatives to encourage behavioral changes that reduce energy use. Both programs encourage the reduction of single-occupancy vehicle travel and encourage walking, bicycling, and public transit use. Way to Go outreach by the *Northwest Regional Planning Commission* saved 10,555 metric tons of CO2 based on participate data.

RPCs are completing park and ride need assessments to determine the effectiveness of current lots and to identify future lot locations. Park and ride lots facilitate ride sharing and support public transit. Southern Windsor lots saved more than 1,189 gallons of fuel per week.

Addison County Regional Planning Commission built data files to help Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR) become the first Google Transit Partner in Vermont and one of the first rural community partners in New England. Google Transit integrates transit stop, route, schedule, and fare information into Google Maps to make transit trip planning easy.

STREETLIGHT INVENTORIES

Communities install streetlights for safety and many other reasons. Streetlight inventories help municipal officials determine if lights can be turned off or if retrofits can be effective. The inventory report identifies cost and energy savings. *Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission* assisted the Town of Hartford with an inventory. Hartford will invest \$100,000 in streetlight retrofits and eliminations, saving \$42,000 in electricity costs annually.



For more information efforts regarding energy conservation and development, contact the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, c/o Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, 3117 Rose Hill, Woodstock, VT 05091, (802) 457-31188, www.vapda.org.