

VAPDA

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2016

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Bennington County Regional Commission	BCRC
Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission	CVRPC
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission	CCRPC
Lamoille County Planning Commission	LCPC
Rutland Regional Planning Commission	RRPC
Northeastern Vermont Development Association	NVDA
Northwest Regional Planning Commission	NRPC
Two Rivers–Ottawaquechee Regional Commission	TRORC
Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission	SWCRPC
Windham Regional Commission	WRC



REGIONAL PLANNING

Northeastern Vermont Development Association, in partnership with the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE), released an extensively updated [2016 Food System Plan](#). The 2016 Plan was made possible with a USDA Rural Business Development Grant. The Plan includes 5-year targets and benchmarks in support of regional goals, as well as research and recommendations for improving options for storing and transporting product to market. Subsequent Northeastern Vermont Development Association commissioned research has already identified the average cost of transportation for food fleets in the state (about 70% higher than nationwide rates) and has developed a cost matrix for shippers, showing the value of product that must be on the truck to achieve selected profit margins.

The Lamoille County Planning Commission completely revised their Act 250 review process, making the process more transparent, understandable and accessible to both developers and municipalities. This new process is already showing results. One recent example is the new McMahan Bros Chevrolet in Hyde Park Village. After discussions with LCPC, McMahan Brothers developed a site plan that met their business needs and also complied with 9(L), the anti-strip development criterion adopted by the Legislature in 2014. The site plan includes opportunities for future bicycle and pedestrian connectivity to Hyde Park Village and the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT), and the dealership's innovative storm water system will reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the Lamoille River Watershed.

Northwest Regional Planning Commission published its first annual regional plan implementation report in July 2016. In cooperation with regional partners and member municipalities, NRPC has already made progress on 85% of its implementation priorities. For example, with respect to economic and community development NRPC coordinated the federally designated Northern Vermont Economic Development District, assisted with management of the local foods initiative and completed a draft regional energy plan. Community resilience efforts included six new local hazard mitigation plans/strategies and updated river corridor and floodplain regulations in eleven municipalities. Water quality initiatives included drafting new local bylaws to regulate water quality impacts, providing direct education and training to municipal officials and establishing a new water quality advisory committee.

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission continues to invest time and resources in implementing their *Regional ECOS Plan*. CCRPC implements the *Plan* through collective impact relationships and projects with member municipalities, GBIC, Department of Health, United Way, Fletcher Allen, UVM, and many other partners. In the last year, CCRPC funded and assisted with form-based code zoning bylaw amendments in Shelburne, Westford and Winooski to make housing and economic development more streamlined in their areas planned for growth. CCRPC has also provided significant funding with partners for Transportation Demand

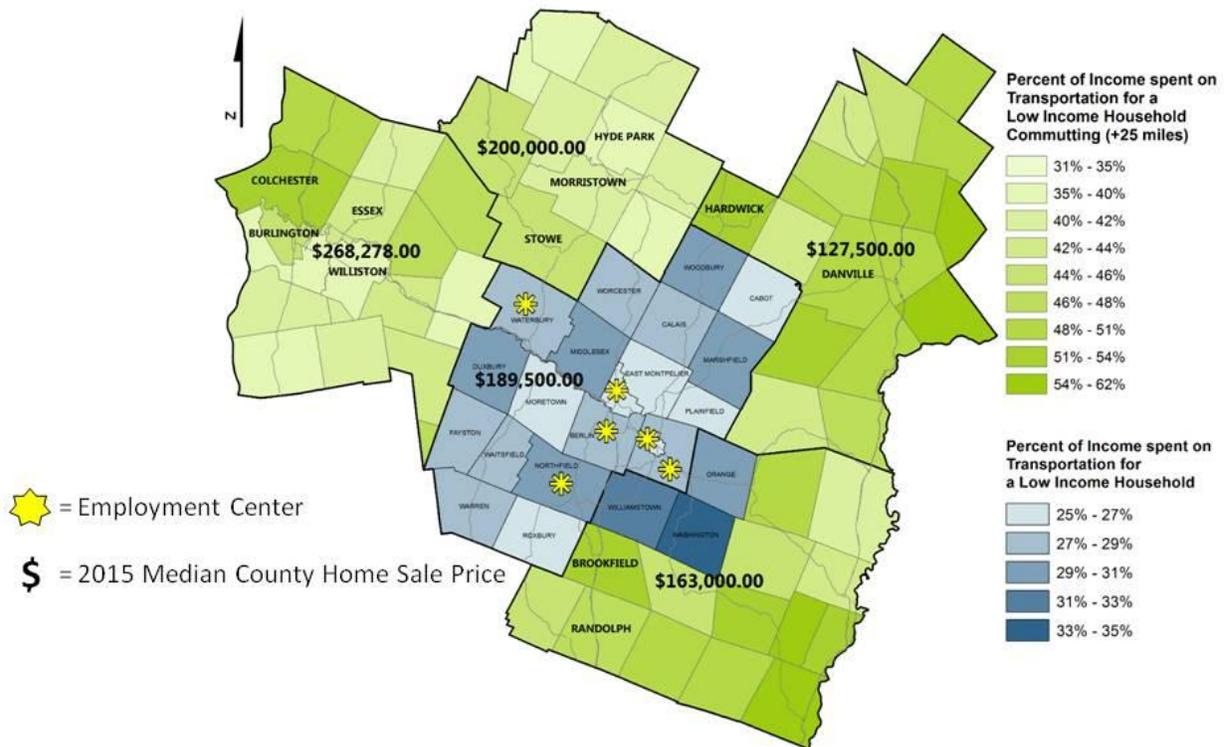


Above: the Northeast Kingdom Food System Summit in Craftsbury, which drew about 100 people in to provide input on goals and objectives for furthering our food system. Picture taken by Seth Fineman.

Management (TDM) initiatives such as *Go! Chittenden County* (a one-stop-shop for information and advice about our region’s transportation resources), *Travel Smarter* (an online trip planner providing directions and displaying the impacts -- time, cost, calories -- of walking, biking, busing, or driving), and the 12th annual *Way to Go! Challenge* (encouraging non-single occupant vehicle travel and demonstrate the environmental and financial benefits). These efforts and many others have resulted in Chittenden County exceeding our objective of 80% of new development in areas planned for growth for the 4th straight year.

During its work on *Plan Central Vermont*, the **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission** adopted a new approach to addressing housing challenges in the region. CVRPC will work with groups of municipalities experiencing shared housing challenges to foster cooperative approaches. Housing affordability is one of the greatest challenges. CVRPC completed a Location Affordability Analysis to raise awareness that traditional

Transportation Cost for Low Income Families



measures of housing affordability ignore the cost of transportation, typically a household’s second largest expenditure. CVRPC is also working to change perceptions of housing by having communities consider the number of available beds, rather than number of available units. As Central Vermont’s population ages, newer models for joint or shared housing will be needed to assist seniors with aging in place.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION



Above: the Hardwick Community Visit Program conducted by NVDA.

Northeastern Vermont Development Association has been an active partner in the Vermont Council on Rural Development [Community Visit Program](#). This year, NVDA participated in Community Visits in Craftsbury and Hardwick, and a third visit is underway in Brighton. The Craftsbury visit greatly energized the outreach and planning efforts to update the [municipal plan](#), and helped secure grant funding to improve broadband access. The Hardwick visit, which helped to solidify support for Downtown Designation, coincided with NVDA's ongoing effort to update the Town's Unified Development Bylaws. The proposed bylaws now include provisions that will help the town become eligible for designation.

Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission completed Community Rating System (CRS) checklists for five municipalities. CRS is part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Communities that enact qualified floodplain management activities exceeding and enhancing federal minimum requirements are rewarded with reduced flood insurance premiums for property owners. CVRPC assisted Waterbury to develop programs and regulations. The Town and Village of Waterbury were accepted into the program property owners with buildings in the 100-year floodplain receive a 5% discount on flood insurance premiums.

The **Bennington County Regional Commission** worked with the Dorset Planning Commission to organize a public meeting, attended by over 100 residents, focusing on historical development trends in the town's two village centers and physical and regulatory barriers to making the centers more economically vibrant and attractive to new businesses and residents. A presentation by an expert on compact mixed use centers pointed to challenges and opportunities faced by historic village centers with limited infrastructure – a situation found throughout the region. BCRC staff has followed up by working with the town to identify needed pedestrian improvements, assisting with a planning grant application, and helping to develop land use regulations that support compact mixed use development.



Above: the villages of Dorset and East Dorset provided the basis for an investigation and discussion of compact mixed use development in historic centers with limited infrastructure.

The NewVista Foundation, led by entrepreneur and engineer David Hall, was acquiring property in the towns of Royalton, Sharon, Tunbridge and Strafford as part of a futuristic vision for a high density, mixed use development involving 5,000 acres and an estimated population of 10,000-20,000 residents. Fortunately for the region, NewVista's vision was just that - a vision - and not a fully designed and proposed development project. The idea that a project of this scale could be proposed in an area that is distinctly rural had never been considered in any of the four towns. Recognizing that the vision was far from being a project, **Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission** engaged the four communities in outreach and education, specifically focusing the discussion on high-density, urban scale development and how it relates to rural and conservation areas in the four communities and the region. Each of the communities are fully engaged in a planning effort that is likely to result in revisions to their town plans that will more effectively address where high-density, mixed use development should be located. TRORC, will also address similar issues in the Regional Plan.



Above : a graphic example of the vision by the NewVista Foundation for a district housing roughly 600 to 800 people. To see more examples and find more information visit <http://www.newvistasfoundation.org>.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Newport Bienvenue! is a marketing and promotion campaign designed to draw Quebec businesses, consumers, and visitors to Newport City. This long-range effort to drive Newport's economic growth was funded by a USDA Rural Business Development Grant awarded to the Newport City Renaissance Corporation (NCRC). **Northeastern**



Above: The logo for the Newport Bienvenue campaign conducted by NVDA.

Northeastern Vermont Development Association

worked closely with the NCRC's downtown committees by providing market research, data analysis, and business support to enhance the Quebec visitor and business experience in Newport, and to develop promotional strategies for reaching the Quebec market.

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

championed an effort to analyze and evaluate the existence and strength of the region's Creative Economy. The purpose of this

investigation, Creative Economy of the East Central Vermont Region, was to find out if the creative economy is as strong as we believed it to be and if so, what needed to be done to support it and help it grow. The report found that as corporate mass production disappears, its earlier strengths in an artisanal production base is being re-discovered. The region is well ahead of the game, with an economy that has been quintessentially artisanal for a long time and already depends heavily on its micro and small businesses. Many of these are innovative hybrids with diverse creative talents that can generate expanded markets. This hybrid industrial model is a large part of the State's and Region's brand. All of these strengths point to an expanding creative economy, the kind of economy in which Vermont and the Region already holds a decided edge. Creative businesses have already revitalized some parts of the Region, and a number of others stand on the cusp of real growth possibilities. TRORC was the recipient of a 2016 National Association of Development Organization (NADO) Innovation award for this project.

Northwest Regional Planning Commission coordinated the re-established Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD) in partnership with the three RDCs and RPCs in the six northern counties. A new advisory Board helped to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that was adopted in April 2016. This unique intergovernmental partnership won a 2016 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations.

Over seventeen miles of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail are now open for year-round recreational use from Morristown to Cambridge. Through a grant awarded by the Northern Border Regional Commission, **Lamoille County Planning Commission** worked with six municipalities to design and construct trailside amenities, develop a wayfinding system, and produce trail maps. Thanks to this work, Jeffersonville, Cambridge and Wolcott now have beautiful trailhead facilities that provide safe access for visitors of all abilities. Hyde Park Village installed attractive wayfinding signs throughout the Village to enhance connectivity between the Village and the trail. The

LCPC facilitated a working group with representatives from Morrisville, Hyde Park, Johnson, and Cambridge to design and provide information brochures and outdoor maps for use by all eight municipalities (Cambridge, Jeffersonville, Johnson Town and Village, Hyde Park Town and Village, Morristown and Morrisville) along the open section of the trail.

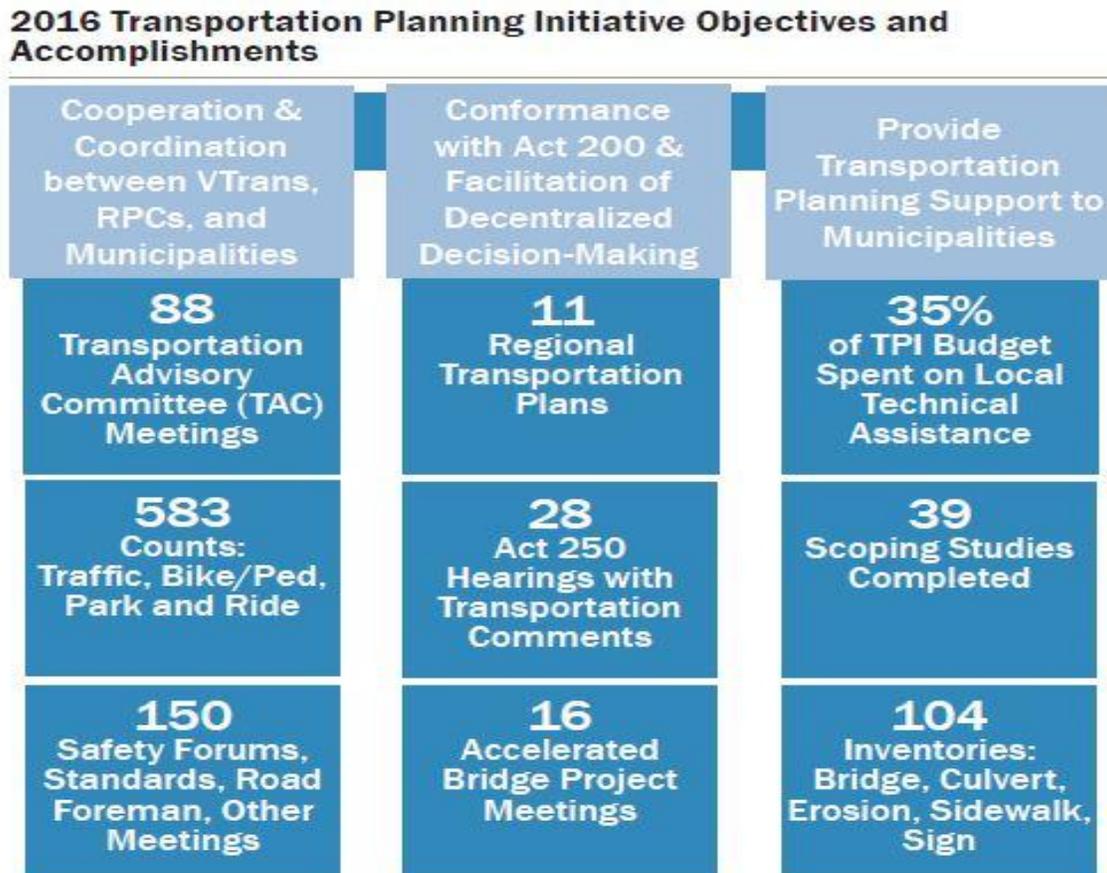
As part of the East Central Vermont Economic Development District, the **Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission** and **Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission** partnered to develop a district-wide understanding of what resilience is and what we can do to become more resilient. We determined that in this area, climate resilience has been the main focus, so partners agreed that economic resilience, not just climate resilience, should be the focus of this effort. Then the SWCRPC developed an Economic Health Report Card to show statistical trends in both regions. Once the data and trending was reviewed, the two RPCs collaborated to develop an action plan to improve economic resilience.

Report Metric	Is up or down a good trend?	Orange County		Windsor County	
		Change over time	Is this change good?	Change over time	Is this change good?
REGIONAL AFFORDABILITY					
Cost burden by housing expenses					
Median Gross rent as % of household income	Down	↑ 4%	⊗	↓ -3%	⊙
Renters					
Total Number of households	Up	↑ 150	⊙	↑ 776	⊙
Total sum for 30% and over	Down	↑ 268	⊗	↑ 23	⊗
30% or more burdened	Down	↑ 8%	⊗	↓ -5%	⊙
50% or more burdened	Down	↑ 6%	⊗	↓ -1%	⊙
Owner w/Mortgage					
Total Number of households	Up	↑ 291	⊙	↓ -697	⊗
Total sum for 30% and over	Down	↑ 296	⊗	↓ -522	⊙
30% or more burdened	Down	↑ 3%	⊗	↓ -2%	⊙
50% or more burdened	Down	↑ 2%	⊗	↓ -1%	⊙
Owner without Mortgage					
Total Number of households	Up	↑ 280	⊙	↑ 83	⊙
Total sum for 30% and over	Down	↑ 30	⊗	↑ 161	⊗
30% or more burdened	Down	↓ -1%	⊙	↑ 2%	⊗
50% or more burdened	Down	↓ -1%	⊙	↓ 0%	!

Above: a sample of the Economic Health Report Card, specifically examining regional affordability for both Windsor and Orange County.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

The Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) Program has three main objectives, covering a variety of projects. The graphic below highlights the projects accomplished through 2016 TPI Program. It also appears in the 2017 VTrans Fact Book.



Creek Road along the Otter Creek south of downtown Middlebury suffers from significant erosion issues throughout its length due to near-annual flooding events. As a result, the road was closed in spring 2015 and a portion of it still remains closed, leaving it impassable to through traffic. Annual maintenance and repair costs to the town regularly exceed \$50,000. In order to explore long-term solutions, Middlebury applied to the [Addison County Regional Planning Commission](#) Transportation Advisory Committee's Transportation Planning Study Program to hire an engineering consultant to (1) identify lower-cost, sustainable alternatives for stabilizing, opening, and maintaining the road and (2) provide cost estimates and conceptual plans for complete road alternatives. The TAC granted Middlebury's study request and ACRPC contracted with Pathways Consulting, LLC on behalf of Middlebury to complete the study.

[Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission](#) received an Excellence in Regional Transportation Award from the National Association of Development Organization (NADO) Research Foundation for the Vermont Road Erosion Risk Analysis project. The Analysis assists municipalities with addressing state and federal clean water requirements by identifying and prioritizing road erosion sites. Using risk analysis data, the Town of Woodbury reduced the cost of road maintenance and improved water quality by improving four road erosion sites. The

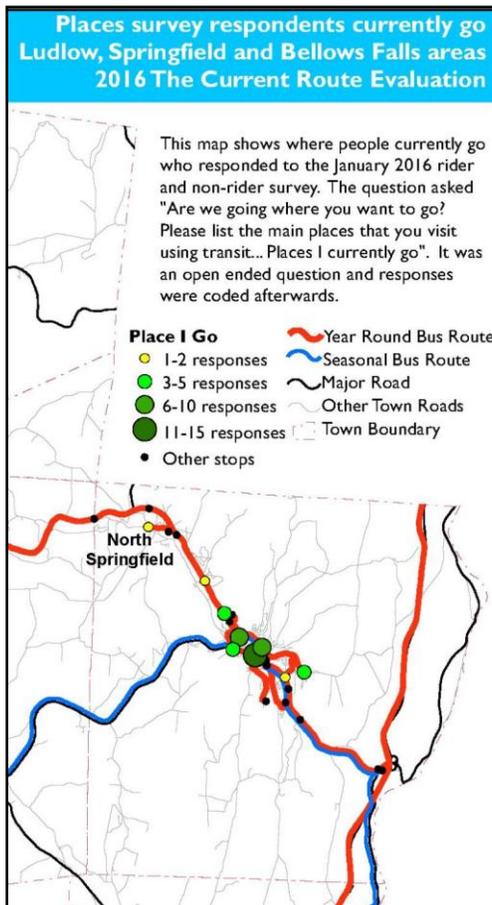
Vermont Road Erosion Risk Analysis methodology was developed by CVRPC in partnership with the Friends of the Winooski River, Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District, Vermont Agency of Natural Resource Department of Environmental Conservation(DEC), and Stone Environmental. The DEC used CVRPC’s tool to create a statewide road erosion risk data set. This municipal assistance tool continues to be refined for statewide use as part of the Municipal Roads General Permit.



Above: Image of Route 30 in Brattleboro, VT

The I-91 Bridge over the West River and Route 30 in Brattleboro forms a physical gateway to the West River Valley heading north, and to Brattleboro heading south. VTrans has provided funding for the **Windham**

Regional Commission to conduct a mini-corridor study, the goal of which is to guide the transformation of Route 30 from West River Park south to Cedar Street into a gateway corridor that encourages compatible economic development, improves public safety, enhances community character and aesthetics, and provides improved multi-modal transportation options to connect the major destinations along this corridor. The intent of the Route 30 gateway is to reinforce a positive community identity, preserve natural areas, cultural resources and scenic viewsheds, expand recreation opportunities, and promote compatible future development along the corridor through a combination of public realm improvements, private development and conservation efforts. Participants include Windham Regional Commission staff, Town of Brattleboro staff, representatives of the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, and a community advisory committee that includes major landowners and residents along the corridor as well as representatives of the Brattleboro Conservation Commission and the Friends of the West River.



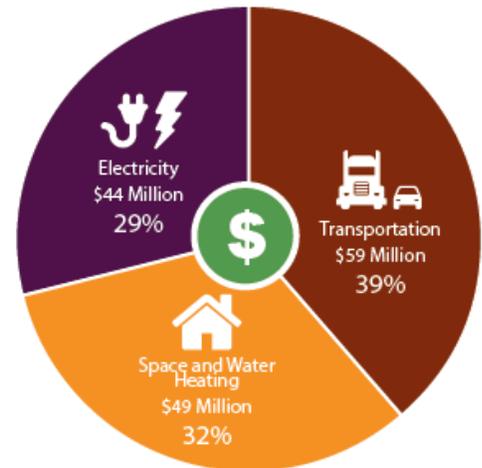
Above: sample of the map indicating destinations from the SWCRPC public transit route evaluation. For more information visit -

<http://swcrpc.org/bus-route-evaluation-project-2016/>.

In 2016, the **Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission** in coordination with VTrans and The Current, a division of Southeast Vermont Transit, completed a public transit route evaluation and planning project. The study focused on the existing services in the towns of Rockingham, Cavendish, Chester, Ludlow and Springfield. It involved engaging stakeholders, evaluating ridership trends, and making suggestions about how to increase ridership and improve service performance measures.

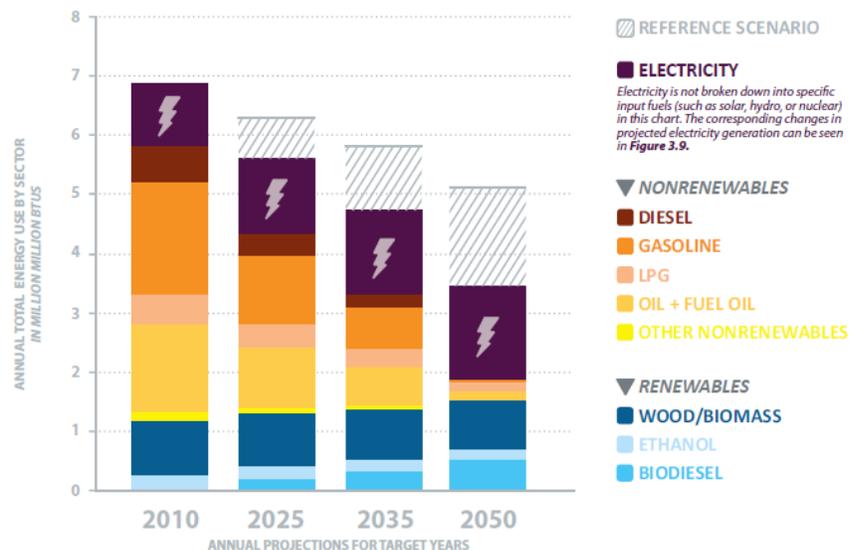
ENERGY PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND CONSERVATION

The **Bennington County Regional Commission** has taken a lead role working with the Public Service Department, Vermont Energy Investment Corporation, Energy Action Network, and two other regional planning commissions to develop new regional energy plans that focus specifically on energy conservation, efficiency, and renewable generation targets tied to Vermont’s energy goals and new comprehensive energy plan. Regional energy plans completed statewide will be used to support the development of municipal energy plans and to represent the regional position on applications for new generation projects before the Public Service Board. Throughout this planning process, BCRC staff has appeared before state agencies, local and regional planners, legislative committees, and others to provide background and examples of energy resource mapping, planning for future energy supply and demand, and integration of land use and transportation planning with energy planning.



Right: The Bennington County Regional Energy Plan includes estimates of current energy use by sector, as well as projections for future energy use by fuel type.

Rutland Regional Planning Commission, under the guidance of an ad hoc Energy Committee, created model municipal plan language for solar generation projects and checklists for evaluating both solar and wind proposed generation projects. The Municipal Solar Siting and Municipal Wind Siting checklists were designed to help town officials when they met with solar and wind project



developers. The checklists contain process-oriented questions as well as more analytical queries about project design. For instance, both checklists ask whether the developer has met with the Planning Commission, Selectboard and neighbors prior to filing for the PSB’s 45-day notice; whether the Planning Commission or Selectboard has made comments to the PSB about the project; and whether either group has held a public meeting to gather public input on the proposed project. Among the more probing analytical questions: whether developers conducted viewshed or other aesthetic studies; or if an effort has been made to site the facility away from valued or sensitive areas such as agricultural land, forests or steep slopes. The wind checklist also asks about whether there will be shut-downs during icing conditions; audible dB above ambient noise volume levels; and light flickering exposure.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND DISASTER RESILIENCY

Following Tropical Storm Irene, **Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission** was responsible for helping the state create its buyout program and in gathering information on properties statewide. To date, 152 properties have been included in the program with 123 purchased. TRORC became the statewide manager of Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and HUD CDBG-Disaster Recovery funds that were, or will be, used to provide the 25% match for 134 FEMA-HMGP buyouts, as well as the for entire project on 18 buyouts that did not qualify for FEMA funding. Future development will be restricted on all of these sites. TRORC is also working with several communities to create park greenspaces on suitable sites.

Over the past year the **Windham Regional Commission** has continued to take the initiative to develop emergency planning templates and guides that satisfy the needs of member towns, but which also become statewide. This year WRC focused on evacuation route guidance and model floodplain bylaws that incorporate new state river corridor requirements. This builds upon prior work on individual damage assessment templates and animal sheltering during disasters guidance. These templates and guides provide citizen planners and professionals with a common foundation of best practices which meet regulatory requirements.

Model Calibration – Johnson (100-year)



Above: image from Lamoille county's High Meadows Resiliency effort of Lamoille River.

alternatives with the potential to reduce flood levels by more than a foot-and-a-half in the Village. While this may not sound like a significant decrease, had these mitigation measures been in place, the 30 plus residents of the Jeffersonville Senior Housing would not have needed to evacuate their homes during the spring 2011 floods.

Addison County Regional Planning Commission staff assisted in the creation and coordination of a regional school safety group for Addison Northwest Supervisory Union. Staff attended regular regional safety meetings and meetings of the Addison County Emergency Planning Committee, helping local groups prepare for and coordinate a regional response to disasters.

With support from the High Meadows Fund Building Resiliency in Vermont Watersheds initiative, the **Lamoille County Planning Commission** developed a hydraulic model of the Lamoille River Main Stem to identify potential actions to reduce flood impacts in Lamoille County towns. 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. This model was then refined with surveyed data for specific areas in Jeffersonville, Cambridge and Johnson to develop a range of potential measures to reduce flooding. A similar model developed several years ago in Jeffersonville identified

BROWNFIELDS

The Vermont Marble Museum (VMM) site was enrolled in the Rutland Region Brownfields Reuse Program in 2010 and received assessment and redevelopment planning funding, combined with public outreach work associated with the Proctor Prosperity Plan created by the [Rutland Regional Planning Commission](#), the property was purchased by the Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV) in 2014. The VMM site in Proctor was the home of the world's largest corporation in 1900. After the decline of the marble industry in the 20th century and like many former industrial sites, it decayed from disinvestment creating blight in the village core. In 2015, PTV received a 350K VCDP Implementation Grant to redevelop the site. Plans include expanding the existing Vermont Marble Museum and the creation of approximately 80,000 sq. ft. of commercial/professional space. The infill redevelopment further will add vibrancy to the village core and contribute to the social and economic sustainability of the town.



Above: an image of the Vermont Marble Museum brownfield site in Proctor.

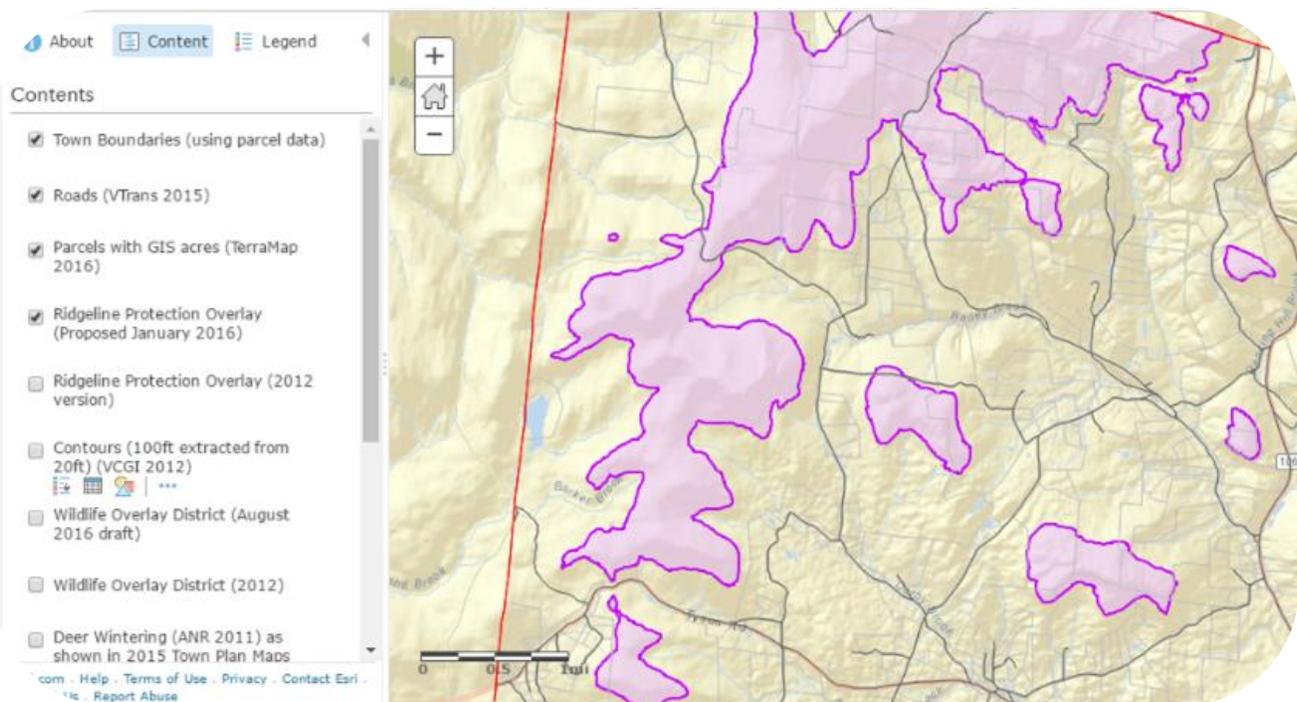
In the heart of St. Albans City's downtown, adjacent to a new state office building was a contaminated property at 43 Lake Street. [Northwest Regional Planning Commission](#) used brownfields grant funds to support the costs of assessment and cleanup of the site. The cleanup is complete and construction of a new hotel is underway.

The Phoenix Awards Institute, Inc. presented Algiers Village Housing, a 17-unit affordable housing development in Guilford, with an award for outstanding achievement in the redevelopment of a brownfield site in New England. [Windham Regional Commission](#) used EPA brownfields funds for the environmental assessments and corrective action planning of the site and then Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development funded the remediation to remove 985 tons of contaminated soil and weathered bedrock and demolish and remove an old tractor repair garage. Senator Patrick Leahy helped secure an EPA grant to fund a .6 mile extension of the Town of Brattleboro's water line to the Village of Algiers, which was crucial to the project moving forward. A group of concerned residents formed the Friends of Algiers Village (FOAV) in 2004 to preserve the village and steer future development. FOAV's first step, in collaboration with Windham & Windsor Housing Trust (WWHT), was to develop a Village Master Plan. The vision for the village center, developed with participation from the community, integrated commercial and residential uses with emphasis on pedestrian-friendly amenities, including walkways and green space. The award was presented in September 2015 in Chicago as part of EPA's major national brownfields conference on environmental revitalization and economic development.

GIS MAPPING

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission works with town planners, zoning administrators and public works officials to customize the map viewers. The majority of available GIS data for the town can be found on the following map viewers. For a list of all available CCRPC interactive maps, go to <http://www.ccrpcvt.org/our-work/gis/>.

The **Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission** increased their planning capabilities by creating a new online map portal. As one example of a project application, the Reading Planning Commission found a need for interactive spatial information to enable better decision making for updates to their zoning maps. They found other online maps to be too cumbersome or limited for their purposes. An online mapping portal created by the SWCRPC enabled Planning Commission members to easily review the proposed boundary amendments of their overlay districts based on other spatial information, such as topography and parcel boundaries. The SWCRPC has also used this portal on other projects, such as a public transit route evaluation project and mapping water quality threats/project sites in the Mill Brook Watershed.



Above: a screen image of a draft zoning map for the town of Reading. More maps can be viewed at <http://swcrpc.maps.arcgis.com>.

WATERSHED PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Addison County Regional Planning Commission received an Ecosystems Restoration Program (ERP) grant on the behalf of the Town of Middlebury to complete a green stormwater retrofit study in a high priority sub-watershed within the downtown. ACRPC worked with Watershed Consulting Associates, LLC to provide 3, 30% designs for green infrastructure systems for improvements to existing stormwater infrastructure that the Otter Creek Tactical Basin Plan had prioritized. Watershed and ACRPC staff presented the plans to the Town of Middlebury, Infrastructure Committee, ANR and ACRPC's Commission. Middlebury is contemplating applying for an implementation grant for the work.



Above: an example of a design for green infrastructure.

WATER QUALITY



All RPCs are implementing a grant provided from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) through **Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission** to conduct a municipal outreach effort focused on improving water quality in compliance with the Vermont Clean Water Act (VCWA). RPCs have begun work with municipal staff and boards to provide information about the VCWA requirements for municipalities. RPCs are also working with towns on options such as stronger bylaws against flood hazards and river corridor erosion, stormwater master planning, and other town plan or zoning changes to improve water quality. Many RPCs have formed a Clean Water Advisory Committee to assist in these efforts. CCRPC is providing ongoing staff support to two intermunicipal water quality services: the *Chittenden County Stream Team* (<http://www.ccstreamteam.org/>) and *Chittenden County Regional Stormwater Education Program* (<http://www.smartwaterways.org>) to comply with EPA stormwater permit requirements for public participation and involvement.

The **Rutland Regional Planning Commission** continues to assist the Town of Rutland as it works to comply with the MS4 permit for the Moon Brook Watershed. Other permittees in the watershed are the City of Rutland and VTTrans. In 2016, a Flow Restoration Plan (FRP) was prepared by Watershed Consulting Associates, LLC for the section of the watershed that falls in Rutland Town. The FRP provides the town with a long-term planning tool to implement best management practices throughout its section of the watershed for the cleanup of water quality stressors. The FRP will eventually become part of the Moon Brook Stormwater Management Plan for the town.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

The **Bennington County Regional Commission** has entered into an agreement with the Bennington County Industrial Corporation (the designated regional development corporation for the area) to provide management and staffing for economic development planning in the region. The collaboration has resulted in a more efficient delivery of services and improved coordination between planning and development activities. One result of this new initiative can be seen in the BCRC led effort to study and produce a plan for redevelopment of a large block located at the intersection of Main Street and South Street in downtown Bennington. A brownfield area-wide planning grant and a municipal planning grant were used to assess site conditions and remediation requirements, and to identify preferred redevelopment scenarios. As a result of this planning effort, the regional planning and development organizations have facilitated formation of a group of local businesses and



institutions that have now purchased the property. The BCRC currently is coordinating work between the investor group, developers, consultants, and prospective business and residential tenants, to begin the development process.

Above: conceptual plan of new mixed use buildings planned for currently vacant land in the center of Bennington's downtown.

find ways to promote the region's important forest economy and the people's understanding of it, worked with a forestry workgroup and the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC) on an exhibit *Shedding Light on the Working Forest* (<http://www.brattleboromuseum.org>). The well-attended exhibit was held from October 2015 to January 2016, and showed forestry related paintings by Kathleen Kolb and poems by Verandah Porche.

Forests are one of the region's most valuable renewable resources and contribute greatly to the region's economy and authentic quality of place, not to mention their fundamental role in water quality. These forests provide a livelihood for many people through wood harvesting, wood products, hunting, tourism, and maple products. As part of the exhibit, a panel was held to discuss how to promote local wood. "Forest Strong" was the message from Michael Snyder, Commissioner of Vermont Forests, Park and Recreation, to a crowd of over 50 people gathered at BMAC. The panel, *Local Wood Local Good*, brought together representatives of forestry-related businesses to discuss how to develop markets for local wood products.

The **Windham Regional Commission**, in an effort to



Above: image taken by Tobias Gelston at the opening of "Shedding Light on the Working Forest" at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center in October 2015.