

LAMOILLE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Lamoille County Planning Commission Fiscal Year 2016 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, including 10 towns and five incorporated villages. 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, and Butternut Mountain Farm. 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.

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 interest 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 23 member Board of Directors. The LCPC has seven highly-qualified full-time and part-time staff that provides support to the Board and its committees and execute the Commission's multifaceted work program.

Municipal Planning and Implementation

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 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:

- ◆ After a multi-year process with the full assistance of the LCPC staff, the Town of Hyde Park and Village of Hyde Park both adopted Unified Development Bylaws. The Village's bylaws replace large setbacks with more flexible standards that better reflect the Village's traditional development pattern. The Land Use and Development Regulations (LUDRs) also contain some elements of Form Based Code, such as roof design and building façade standards, aimed at fostering pedestrian scale, mixed use development.
- ◆ The Town of Wolcott is considering adopting bylaws that will enhance existing provisions for "conservation subdivisions" in rural areas and facilitate infill/redevelopment in the Village, in light of the closure of Buck's furniture.
- ◆ With assistance from LCPC, Cambridge and Jeffersonville continue to implement major aspects

of the “Jeffersonville Flood Mitigation Master Plan.” The mitigation measures are funded through a mix of HMGP, CDBG, and State ERP funds, and, once implemented, will reduce flood levels in the Village core by up to 1.5 feet. Had such measures been in place during the flood of 2011, evacuation of the Village’s Senior Housing would not have been needed.

- ◆ LCPC assisted the Town and Village of Johnson with developing a Unified Municipal Development Plan. This is the first time the Town and Village decided to create a unified plan rather than two separate plans.
- ◆ With LCPC’s assistance, the Town of Eden began the process of revising their Town Plan and evaluated whether or not to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program.
- ◆ LCPC provided ongoing assistance to Belvidere for transportation project planning and management including project management services for replacement of the culvert on Bog Road as well as project management services for the Better Back Roads Florence Road project.
- ◆ A new Brownfields Revitalization grant will complete environmental site assessments and clean-up planning so properties can be sold or re-developed to benefit the economy, create/protect jobs, enhance quality of life, and increase housing opportunities.
- ◆ 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. Staff provided Vermont Clean Water Fund Outreach and Assistance and assisted in the development of the Lamoille River Tactical Basin Plan.
- ◆ LCPC provided assistance identifying appropriate funding sources, defining project scope, and writing applications for numerous municipalities which among other grants resulted in municipal planning grants for Eden, Johnson and Wolcott.
- ◆ The Commission provided application development and mapping assistance to assist Johnson and Waterville with Village designation. Staff also provide mapping and application assistance to the Town of Morrystown for an application to the Downtown Transportation Fund.

Regional Planning

RPC’s 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 Lamoille County Planning Commission completely revised their 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. The Planning Commission reviewed and commented on seven major Act 250 applications and four Section 248 applications with hearings.

The revised Lamoille County Regional Plan was adopted in November 2015. The Commission began the process of redefining Substantial Regional Impact (SRI) criteria in the spring. The SRI criteria included in the Lamoille Regional Plan had not been updated since 1991 and we believe that this update will be crucial to further improving LCPC’s Act 250 review process.

Adoption of the new Regional plan furthered the implementation of responsible infill and LCPC is considered a leader in assisting with the implementation of the new criteria 9L in the Act 250 process.

Data included in the revised Regional Plan assisted the Lamoille County Solid Waste District in receiving a Northern Borders Commission grant for a new composting facility. Such a facility was identified as a high priority in the regional plan.

Brownfields

Vermont RPCs have sought and have been awarded over 10 million dollars 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 LCPC received a total of \$400,000 in Assessment Grant Funds from the US EPA. (\$200,000 for hazardous sites and \$200,000 for petroleum sites). A major focus of this year's round of assessments is revitalizing properties along the recently opened Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. In FY 16 we communicated with four potential beneficiaries with the goal of presenting their funding requests to the LCPC's Brownfields Committee in FY17. The beneficiaries included the Village of Jeffersonville, the Town of Hyde Park, the Village of Johnson and a property owner of a former foundry in Morrisville. The Village of Jeffersonville strives to transform the former Bell Gates lumber yard into a gateway park to the Village and regrade uncontaminated portions of the property for flood storage and conveyance. The Town of Hyde Park would like to develop a vacant parcel adjacent to the former railroad as a trailhead facility serving Lamoille Valley Rail Trail users. Johnson Village applied for planning assistance to prepare an economic revitalization plan for village areas adjacent to the Rail Trail. A vision for the former foundry is to transform it into a makerspace for new entrepreneurs and a sculpture park.

Economic and Community 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.

Over seventeen miles of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail spanning Lamoille County are now open for year round recreational use. LCPC, through a grant awarded by the Northern Border Regional Commission, worked with six municipalities to construct trailside amenities, develop a wayfinding system and produce trail maps. Thanks to this work, Jeffersonville, Cambridge and Wolcott now have beautiful trailhead kiosks. Hyde Park is in the process of installing attractive wayfinding signs throughout Hyde Park Village to enhance connectivity between the Village and the trail. The LCPC entered into a contract to design and provide information brochures and outdoor maps for municipalities along the open section of the trail.

The Wolcott, Hyde Park, and Hyde Park Village bylaw amendments noted earlier contain simplified review process, including administrative review. All three bylaws also contain provisions for "agricultural enterprises" and forest products processing that will ensure these activities can occur in rural areas of the working landscape.

LCPC reached an agreement with the Lamoille Economic Development Corporation such that the Executive Directors of each organization now serve ex officio on the others' boards. This new

level of coordination allows for improved communication, development and community outreach.

In 2016, the Executive Director of LCPC served as Co-Chair of the Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD). The NVEDD completed work on a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and is poised to further contribute to economic development throughout the Lamoille County region.

The Commission along with members of the Smugglers Notch Partnership, completed the first full summer of operations at the Barnes Camp Visitor Center. The renovated Barnes Camp at the base of the Notch on the Stowe side, has become a popular spot for tourists exploring the area.

Transportation Planning

Through contract with the VTTrans, 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.

In this reporting period, the Lamoille County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met 10 times, with a member participation rate of 36%. Three outcomes of this year's TAC activities include:

1. Revised TAC Rules of Procedure for purpose of encouraging municipal participation.
2. Morrisville-Stowe Airport (KMVL) presentation by Airport Management Staff which resulted in municipalities' renewed enthusiasm and improved understanding of master planning process.
3. Fostered communication and coordination between municipalities and ANR regarding Clean Water Fund, Municipal Road Permits, and other water quality issues.

The Lamoille County Road Foremen Network was successfully revitalized in 2015 after several years of inactivity. The Road Foremen and Commissioners quickly recognized the importance of spending time with their peers in neighboring municipalities, and excitedly requested regular, quarterly meetings. The group has met three times during this reporting period. This group has been very important in communicating across towns throughout the region and heightening awareness of regional planning, road networks and water quality issues.

Other Outreach and Municipal assistance included the three road foremen network meetings, two meetings about road and bridge codes and standards and six outreach meetings about water quality issues.

Transportation staff helped complete a multi-year cross-county interpretive panel project as part of the Green Mountain Byway (route 100 from Waterbury to Stowe). The panels provide cultural and historical information for tourists and other users of the byway.

Working with the Smugglers' Notch Partnership, LCPC designed and erected interpretive panels along Route 108 from Stowe to Cambridge.

In 2016 the Commission concluded a multi-year scoping study of the potential for bicycle and pedestrian connectivity between Morrisville and Stowe.

The LCPC conducted a road erosion inventory in Stowe and began another in Hyde Park. Road erosion inventories are an important tool for towns to use in prioritizing water quality projects.

The Commission collaborated on a road safety audit, participated in two elderly & disabled public transit meetings, facilitated and sponsored a roads & rivers training with ANR staff and conducted two road surface and sign inventories.

Data collected by the LCPC for VTrans included: 2 bridge/culvert inventories, 23 traffic counts, 13 bike/ped counts, and 6 park-n-ride counts. The staff conducted four project scoping efforts, and participated in an accelerated bridge program public meetings.

The LCPC Regional Transportation Plan is incorporated into the Regional Plan, adopted November 24, 2015. The LCPC staff participated in the review of 7 Act 250 applications which involved transportation issues.

The TPI Short Range Planning Task budget, which supports municipal planning, is approximately 20% of LCPC's total TPI budget. Example projects that fall under Short Range Planning are:

- ◆ Water Quality: provided coordination with ANR and facilitated group and individual discussions with municipal staff and boards in all 10 towns.
- ◆ Road Erosion Inventories: LCPC GIS Planner continued coordination and software development input to other RPC staff and ANR; combined other funds with TPI budget to optimize resources and outcomes; conducted one inventory and began another.
- ◆ Feasibility Study: in coordination with staff and volunteers from Jeffersonville and Cambridge, LCPC staff managed a master plan and scoping study for the Jeffersonville area and presented the final report to both municipalities.
- ◆ Traffic Counts: extensive collaboration, beyond our usual annual counting program, with VTrans traffic counting staff to collect data for analysis of traffic pattern changes before and after the Morristown Truck Route Project.

Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Resiliency

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 assisted as needed in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene and other declared disasters.

The LCPC developed a hydraulic model of the Lamoille River Main Stem to identify potential actions to reduce flood impacts in Lamoille County towns. 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. Examples of measures include infrastructure retrofits, flood plain restoration, or elevation of structures. The findings of this investigation will be incorporated into town plans and hazard mitigation plans. The flood modeling was made possible thanks to a grant from High Meadows and the consulting work of Milone & MacBroom engineers.

- ◆ Ten of 10 (100%) of municipalities in the region currently have a hazard mitigation plan either adopted or under review.
- ◆ Ten of 10 (100%) of municipalities in the region currently have an updated local emergency plan.
- ◆ The LCPC continued to provide administrative and technical assistance to LEPC#11 (Local Emergency Planning Committee) to host trainings and emergency preparedness discussions.
 - ◇ Emergency preparedness trainings/presentations held in FY 2016 include:
 - VT Health Department’s role in emergency response.
 - Tactics for responding to public information requests from the media/community members during an emergency.
 - Avian Flu Training on the impacts of Avian Flu and preparedness steps.
 - CFATS (Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards) Program and steps companies can take to improve security at their facilities.
 - Presentation on the results of the Smugglers’ Notch Hazardous Materials Survey, focused on assessing response capabilities in the Notch.
 - FirstNet, the National Public Safety Broadband Network.
 - Demonstration on capabilities of the Lamoille County Mass Casualty Incident Trailer.
- ◆ Assisted LEPC#11 in conducting a Mapping Project focused on assisting towns in updating and developing emergency maps to aid navigation throughout Lamoille County during emergency events.
- ◆ Assisted in developing and analyzing a Lamoille County survey to gauge interest in rebuilding the Lamoille Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).
- ◆ Assisted in drafting and revising six single jurisdiction Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (Cambridge, Hyde Park, Wolcott, Johnson, Stowe, Belvidere).
- ◆ Assisted in updating 4 Local Annex’s to the Lamoille County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (Eden, Elmore, Waterville, Stowe).

Geographic Information System Services

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.

- ◆ Conducted Town Road Infrastructure and Flood Damage Susceptibility GIS analysis and field visits to examine areas in Belvidere and Stowe that may be vulnerable to flood damage. This effort can help the towns improve their flood resiliency.
- ◆ Continued mapping support for the Friends of Bobolink volunteer monitors that enabled them to pinpoint and document the location of these grassland birds, which have declined in number by 75 percent since 1966.
- ◆ Used GIS technology to develop road erosion inventory procedure for Hyde Park and future

inventories. The procedure is part of the interim guidance for ANR's Municipal Roads General Permit and will help Hyde Park be better prepared for future permit applications.

- ◆ Developed maps for the following:
 - ◇ 2016 Unified Johnson Town Plan.
 - ◇ Morristown zoning updates.
 - ◇ Morristown Designated Downtown Maps.
 - ◇ Wolcott zoning updates.
 - ◇ Eden Town Plan.
 - ◇ Act 250 Permits.
 - ◇ Stowe Culvert Inventory.
 - ◇ Village Center Designation Applications for Morristown, Johnson, Waterville, and Hyde Park.
 - ◇ e-911 address points for emergency responders in Wolcott and Elmore.
 - ◇ Johnson and Belvidere Hazard Mitigation Plans and flood hazard maps for the Town of Eden.
 - ◇ Town of Cambridge Hazard Mitigation project to depict flood improvement and flood-plain restoration project locations.
 - ◇ River Corridor Planning process in Elmore.
 - ◇ Hyde Park unified bylaws.
 - ◇ Emergency maps for Johnson State College.
 - ◇ Updated flood hazard bylaws for Wolcott.

Energy Conservation and Development

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.

In 2016, LCPC was identified as one of the regional planning commissions that would be part of the second round of pilot projects on energy planning, review and analysis. The Lamoille County Planning Commission worked with municipalities to incorporate incentives for energy efficiency and green development into their land use by laws.

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 implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions.

- ◆ As part of the Clean Water Initiative, conducted outreach on the Lamoille Tactical Basin Plan and assisted ANR with the development of the plan. Also conducted outreach on updates to water quality standards, river corridor planning, stormwater master planning, and flood resiliency.
- ◆ Provided grant writing technical assistance for a Stream Geomorphic Assessment and River Corridor Plan for the Seymour River Watershed in Cambridge. The plan will help to identify

restoration and protection projects to be included in later versions of the Lamoille Tactical Basin Plan and be eligible for upcoming grant opportunities.

- ◆ Assisted the Cambridge Conservation Commission and Cambridge Elementary School in hiring a storm water specialist to design two mitigation projects to control runoff from impervious surfaces on school grounds, which will improve water quality in the Brewster River.
- ◆ As part of the High Meadows Fund, hired and managed consultant to develop flood model to help Lamoille watershed communities understand their risks and prioritize roads and other infrastructure for restoration, conservation, or adaptation. Also conducted flood resiliency workshops with High Meadows funds to educate businesses, residents, and contractors about ways to reduce risks and flood damage to their properties.
- ◆ Provided grant writing technical assistance to Hyde Park for a Better Roads grant to improve water quality through reduced sedimentation from road erosion and began road erosion assessment. This assessment will result in toolkit for Hyde Park to repair damaged area themselves or to apply for future grants to comply with the upcoming Municipal Roads General Permit.
- ◆ Assisted Town of Elmore with adopting river corridor protection ordinance.
- ◆ Worked with Town of Wolcott on updating flood hazard regulations for stronger protections.

Special Projects

Last year, LCPC in partnership with the Town and Village of Cambridge, Village of Jeffersonville, Town and Village of Johnson, and Town of Wolcott, received a grant from the High Meadows Fund. A major component of this grant is creation of a model of the entire main stem of the Lamoille River through Lamoille County. 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. A similar model developed several years ago in Jeffersonville identified 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.

With the model complete, the next step is to test potential alternatives. The model can be adapted to local conditions and the specific needs of a community by testing a range of mitigation alternatives such as retrofits of bridges and culverts, elevations of structures, and conservation. The first set of locations will include the Wrong Way Bridge/Pumpkin Harbor Road in Cambridge and the Wastewater Treatment Plant/Sterling Market in Johnson -- both areas where the local communities have expressed concerns related to flooding. While there are only enough resources in the current grant to test these two locations, the model will be available to Lamoille County communities to evaluate alternates throughout the watershed. In the future the model will be another tool for communities working to become more flood resilient.

The project also included three flood resiliency workshops. LCPC worked with Stevens and Associates in Brattleboro, VT to run the workshops. The first workshop was geared towards business owners. A second workshop was targeted towards homeowners and business owners.

The Commission, in partnership with Lamoille Family Center and funding from the VT Department of Health, developed "A Primer on Planning for Prevention." The Primer serves as a guide for mu-

municipalities interested in including substance abuse prevention policies and actions into their town plans. Because addressing substance misuse in municipal plans and regulations is an emerging field, the Primer was written with the goal to engage municipal officials and planning commission in a discussion about this important topic.

Administration and Funding

In 2016, The Commission updated all internal financial processes and procedures to ensure compliance with all federal, state and grant requirements. In addition the Commission actively engaged in Board recruitment resulting in more board seats being filled from a diversity of municipalities and a newly energized and engaged board.

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.

For the 2016 fiscal year, the LCPC's total projected revenue of approximately \$1.062 million dollars was derived from a mix of regional project grant funding, municipal project grant funding, EPA Brownfields funding, a grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission, state performance contract funding, and a small amount from town assessments.

Virtually all of 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, community development, Brownfields redevelopment, water quality, 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 & Northern Vermont Economic Development District). The LCPC is audited on an annual basis.

LCPC at Work: FY 2016

