

NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

Northeastern Vermont Development Association Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report

As the state's only combined Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and Economic Development Corporation, NVDA offers seamless delivery of a full complement of services in general planning and transportation planning, mapping, community development, economic development, and grant writing and administration. Each year our staff provides more than 8,000 hours of assistance to its 50 member municipalities.

Municipal Planning and Implementation

RPCs act as a cost effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. This is especially true in the Northeast Kingdom, where few municipalities have dedicated planning or community development staff. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and bylaws and keeping abreast of statutory requirements. All technical assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map. Highlights include:

Area designation.

- ◆ Staff provided on-site trainings for the newly formed Lunenburg Planning Commission and the Hardwick Planning Commission.
- ◆ NVDA assisted the Towns of St. Johnsbury, Danville, Sheffield, and Newark in efforts to update their respective plans.
- ◆ Planning staff were instrumental in the development and adoption of new plans in Craftsbury and Waterford, both funded by Municipal Planning Grants.
- ◆ We continue to work on plan updates in Canaan, Groton, and Holland, all of which have been funded by Municipal Planning Grants.
- ◆ NVDA assisted the Town of St. Johnsbury in master planning for public access to the Passumpsic River from the Designated Downtown. This work was funded in part by a Municipal Planning Grant.
- ◆ Our region gained a new Designated Village Center when we helped the Town of Concord prepare a successful application. We also assisted the Town of Brighton in renewing and expanding its Designated Village Center.
- ◆ NVDA worked with Hardwick to update its Unified Development Bylaws to make the town eligible for Downtown Designation. Finally, our staff worked with the St. Johnsbury Planning Commission to identify areas suitable for application to the State for Village Center designation.

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.

- ◆ Plan Updates: NVDA's Regional Plan was extensively updated and adopted in early FY2016.

The Housing and Economic Development sections of the Regional Plan were used as the basis of the Town of Lunenburg's first efforts at municipal planning and have assisted Glover in its plan updates. The regional plan also provided support for the Town of Lunenburg's successful VCDP application for an economic development project.

Additional regional planning endeavors:

- ◆ NVDA staff developed and edited the Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD) *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS) with participation from many regional constituents. NVEDD is comprised of the six northern counties in Vermont: Caledonia, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Orleans and has received its designation from the Economic Development Administration of the US Department of Commerce. The CEDS provides the District with an economic development strategy to improve the regional economy.
- ◆ NVDA staff has supported the development of the strategic plan for the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative. This strategic plan maintains the Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) designation by USDA Rural Development for the Northeast Kingdom. This designation allows Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties to access a reserved set of grant funds only available to REAP Zones to support economic and community development initiatives.
- ◆ NVDA staff provided comment on the State's Qualified Allocation Plan, providing a regional perspective on priorities in the allocation of Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and provided comment on proposed state legislation regarding workforce housing.

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.

- ◆ While NVDA did not receive any EPA awards for environmental site assessments in the past year, we did continue to help the Towns of St. Johnsbury and Barton identify and pursue new uses and developments for contaminated properties in their Designated Downtown and Village Center.

Economic and Community Development

Economic growth is best supported when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. Because we are a fully integrated organization, holistic economic and community development is an NVDA forte.

- ◆ In late April, NVDA helped to organize and participate in the VT – Quebec Enterprise Initiatives Business to Business event at Jay Peak Resort. Twenty-six Quebec companies interested in doing business in VT were represented at the networking event. Day 2 of the event involved a tour of local manufacturers.
- ◆ NVDA helped three local manufacturers receive Regional Economic Development Grant awards from the VT Dept. of Buildings and General Services. The awards have allowed each company to expand and create new jobs.
- ◆ Working with the VT Council on Rural Development, NVDA was heavily involved in *Community Visit* processes in Craftsbury and Hardwick. These events attract huge numbers of local resi-

dents and are instrumental in establishing community priorities over the near and long term.

- ◆ NVDA provides ongoing support to the Economic Restructuring Committee in St. Johnsbury, the town's Designated Downtown organization. NVDA staff is also very active on the Economic Development Committee, the Business Retention and Recruitment Sub-committee, and the Board of Directors of the Newport City Renaissance Corporation (NCRC), the city's Designated Downtown organization.
- ◆ NVDA provided the Quebec data research and consumer profiles and administered the *Bienvenue Newport* USDA grant for NCRC. This grant is designed to assist Newport businesses in understanding marketing opportunities to Quebec consumers. Additionally, NVDA hosted business forums for Orleans County businesses on employee retention and marketing strategies in the face of the opening of the Walmart SuperCenter in Derby.

Transportation Planning

RPCs 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. RPCs serve as the point of delivery for the statewide transportation planning process to support local, regional, state, and federal transportation network advancement. Highlights for FY2016 include:

- ◆ NVDA continued the inspection and mapping of "Town Highway Shorts" (structures between 6 and 20 ft.) These structures have not been mapped or inspected by VTrans for many years, so our towns lack accurate information on their condition. NVDA is working with towns to compile information into the VT Online Bridge and Culvert Inventory Tool (VOBCIT) by the end of calendar 2016. In FY16 we completed preliminary inspection and mapping for 19 towns.
- ◆ NVDA facilitates quarterly E&D (elderly and disabled) Transit joint working group meeting for Lamoille, NEK service providers and RCT. These are productive working meetings that bring service providers and transit administrators together to improve work flow as well as address concerns and prepare for special events.
- ◆ Staff also facilitates Road Foreman meetings in VTrans Districts 7 and 9. These meetings have been very productive venues for addressing the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) requirements, as well as in-stream permit procedures, and ditching and road maintenance best management practices. We also continue to train road foremen on the use of the VOBCIT.
- ◆ NVDA facilitates and coordinates the NEK Rivers and Roads Working Group. This group includes staff from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans County Conservation District Managers, regional watershed managers, and VTrans District Maintenance Project Managers. This group collaboratively assists towns in the region with issues related to erosion inventories (to comply with the MRGP), Better Backroads applications, and project implementation.
- ◆ NVDA completed 107 traffic counts for our towns, as well as six speed studies.
- ◆ Storage and distribution among the region's agricultural entrepreneurs and food producers remains a challenge. In FY2016, the CAE and NVDA commissioned a distribution and storage study among producers, growers and distributors to identify opportunities for collaboration and establish best practices. The study also identified a potential need for a shared used re-

refrigeration truck service (modelled after Zipcar™). NVDA has commenced an additional study to determine feasibility and profitability.

Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Resiliency

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and emergency preparedness through its work with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. NVDA provides staff assistance 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. NVDA also helps update local floodplain bylaws, prepare FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans and assist as needed in special circumstances like federally declared disasters.

- ◆ NVDA staff is working diligently to development FEMA-approved local hazard mitigation plans. Currently, five of our municipalities have approved plan, and another four have plans under review. Other plans are being developed.
- ◆ Thirty-nine towns (78 %) in the NVDA region have up-to-date Local Emergency Operations Plan.
- ◆ NVDA sponsored an Emergency Planning Workshop in 2016 for mobile home residents on emergency preparedness.
- ◆ NVDA worked with the town of Canaan to secure a grant to put a new generator in the Municipal Building which serves as the Emergency Operations Center during a disaster/emergency.
- ◆ NVDA staff participated in the State Vigilant Guard Exercise that was conducted from July 27, 2016 through August 1, 2016. First responders from NVDA towns, as well as the two hospitals in the region, participated in this exercise to be more agile in their response to major incidents, such as mass casualties or epidemics.

Geographic Information System Services

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. Highlights for FY2016 include:

- ◆ NVDA's GIS specialists provided critical support for Village Center Designation efforts (current and potential) to Orleans Village, Barton Village, Brownington, Concord, Hardwick, Irasburg and St. Johnsbury.
- ◆ Our staff provided plan maps (either in draft or final form) to Barton, Canaan, Craftsbury, Granby, Holland, Irasburg, Sheffield and Waterford. Zoning maps included Barton, Danville, Granby, Maidstone, Peacham, Ryegate and Waterford.
- ◆ Staff also produced maps in support of flood resilience initiatives in Burke, Canaan, Craftsbury, Holland, Irasburg, Newark, Sheffield, Waterford and Wheelock.
- ◆ In addition to producing maps in support of NVDA's new Regional Plan, we mapped the distribution points for regional food producers and growers and also analyzed the changes to cropland vs. development using data from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.
- ◆ An additional special project included the Northern Borderlands Region free trade zone industrial park inventory and presentation map, as well as a sub-regional analysis of development (and land fragmentation) patterns. This analysis is innovative in that it is conducted by road

segments in towns impacted by expansion in the Burke Mountain and Jay Peak ski areas.

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.

- ◆ NVDA staff followed developments in solar siting standards and amendments to state statute affected by Act 174 and advised member municipalities of these changes.
- ◆ NVDA publicized energy efficiency opportunities and other state programs to businesses and municipalities through our newsletters and direct outreach.
- ◆ NVDA worked with a solar developer on the purchase and redevelopment of a previously contaminated industrial property in North Troy. The solar project will provide benefits to the public buildings in the community.
- ◆ NVDA assisted the Town of Lunenburg with a Community Development Block Grant to facilitate the development of the Kingdom Pellets project at a former paper mill site. The grant will be loaned to the business, and loan repayments will recapitalize a regional revolving loan fund. NVDA also supported the business' application for a VT Employment Growth Incentive award for its job creation aspects.

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, resulting in better and safer growth management decisions.

- ◆ NVDA planners conducted public outreach in Newport City and St. Johnsbury to address the implications of Act 64 (aka the Vermont Clean Water Act).
- ◆ We helped numerous towns navigate the River Corridor identification and protection process by providing technical assistance and producing maps for Lyndon, Groton, Ryegate, Jay, Granby, Greensboro, and Brighton. The Town of Lyndon, which has the most extensive level of flood risk exposure in our region, adopted River Corridor protection regulations. It is the first municipality in our region to achieve the maximum level (80%) of state funding under the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund.
- ◆ Our tactical basin planning updates included outreach and collaboration between watershed planners and towns within the Missisquoi Bay, Lamoille River, and Lake Memphremagog watersheds. Plan updates are ongoing.
- ◆ We also continue to provide technical assistance, outreach, and education for road erosion risk analyses and storm water master planning to interested municipalities.

Special Projects

The Northeast Kingdom has seen significant growth and opportunity in the agriculture and food-based economy. NVDA's ongoing partnership with the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) is helping to sustain this thriving sector. Since 2011, we have been the only region to have a comprehensive Regional Food System Plan. In FY2016 NVDA staff worked closely with the CAE to exten-

sively update the original plan, with public outreach culminating in a Food System Summit that drew more than 100 attendees. The Plan is expected to provide significant guidance in agriculture - and food-related planning and economic development initiatives. Additionally, NVDA and the CAE co-hosted the statewide 2015 *Financing the Working Landscape Conference* at Sterling College in Craftsbury. The event attracted 100 working lands participants. NVDA is organizing the 2016 conference, which will be held in Orleans.

In recent years, NVDA's staff have pursued and maintained professional designations such as American Institute of Certified Planner (AICP) from the American Planning Association and Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) from the Association of State Floodplain Managers. Both designations have helped to raise the caliber of NVDA's technical service offerings, and, through a commitment to continuing education, allowed us to bring fresh perspectives and ideas to our planning communities. NVDA recently hosted a training for local floodplain administrators led by officials from the DEC and FEMA. Our ongoing collaboration with the DEC is likely to lead to more towns joining the National Flood Insurance Program, as well as improvement floodplain administration practices in towns that currently participate in the program.

Administration and Funding

NVDA's revenues come from numerous sources, including a share of the state's property tax funds; private, state, and federal grants; and annual appropriations from each of our member communities. We also receive rental income from the Charles E. Carter Business Resource Center, and other income from contracted technical support services, such as grant administration and municipal plan and bylaw development.

NVDA also has two Intermediary Relending Programs from USDA Rural Development, and a Non-profit Community Development Organization relending program capitalized by loan payments from Community Development Block Grants. Although NVDA has no new relending activity to report for FY2016, our board recently amended our lending policy, which will allow us to tailor more flexible and competitive loan packages for new and expanding businesses in the near future.

Our FY2015 audit, like previous years, produced no significant findings. Our FY2016 audit will be available in December.

