

# RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## Rutland Regional Planning Commission Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report

The Rutland Region is comprised of 27 communities ranging in population from under 300 to over 16,000. The Region contains one regional center (Rutland City), six sub-regional centers of economic activity, and a series of smaller villages surrounded by agricultural and forest land. The Rutland Region has a diverse settlement pattern, with everything from compact village centers surrounded by rural landscapes, to second homes for part-time residents to industrial development.

The economy of the Region is diverse, with industries including GE, 1 University, 3 colleges, Killington/Pico Ski Resorts, solar development and also a wide variety of small, family-run businesses. The physiology of the Region varies dramatically as well, containing the peaks of the Southern Green Mountains, which reach up to 4,000 feet in elevation, the gently sloped farmland of the Vermont Valley, the steep Taconic Mountains, Lake Bomoseen, the largest lake within the borders of the state, and part of the Champlain Valley.

### Municipal Planning and Implementation

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 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 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 appears on the At Work map; highlights include:

- ◆ The RRPC worked with the Planning Commissions in the towns of Sudbury, Danby, Rutland Town, Poultney, Fair Haven, Chittenden, Clarendon, Pawlet, Hubbardton, Mendon, Fair Haven and Castleton to develop language for municipal plans and land use bylaws.
- ◆ RRPC provided assistance to promote state land use goals, ensure consistency with Chapter 117 requirements, and provide clear community standards regarding the siting of energy and telecommunications facilities. Significant effort went into flood resilience education.
- ◆ An update of the Town of Wallingford Zoning Regulations – focused on creating form-based standards to allow for new development in the historic village center to recreate and reinforce existing development patterns.
- ◆ Review of approximately 30 Act 250 and Section 248 applications.
- ◆ Seven Enhanced Consultations with towns.
- ◆ Worked with the towns of Middletown Springs, West Rutland, Proctor and Danby on Village Center Designations (both new and renewals).
- ◆ Model flood resiliency language was created for use in municipal plans.

- ◆ RRPC created model municipal plan language for solar generation siting and provided municipalities with checklists for evaluating solar and wind generation projects.
- ◆ Worked with Pawlet on amending its Unified Bylaws to add more current River Corridor Protection language to its zoning.
- ◆ Presented Castleton and Hubbardton with water quality protection language for draft municipal plans.
- ◆ With VT DEC Watershed Coordinator Ethan Swift, scheduled a joint Selectboard and Planning Commission meeting in Clarendon to discuss water quality and flood resilience projects.

### Regional Planning

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

- ◆ The RRPC updated four chapters including Land Use, Agriculture, Forestry and Energy. These revisions reflect the required and recommended changes identified by the independent review of regional plans, Acts 64 and 171, as well as changes the RRPC decided were needed.
- ◆ The RRPC used the Rutland Regional Plan as a guide for reviewing Act 250 and Section 248 applications. The Commissioners' analysis and evaluation of projects refers to the content and goals cited in the Regional Plan. Grant applications for transportation projects, municipal planning, and village center designation applications all refer to supporting language in the Regional Plan.

### Brownfields

Vermont RPCs have sought and been awarded over 10 million dollars for this economic development initiative. Environmental site assessments allow properties to be sold, developed, or redeveloped in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs, and increase housing opportunities.

The Rutland Region Brownfields Reuse Program (BRP) has existed for twelve years and has received approximately \$2.5 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.

- ◆ Partnering with the Town of Proctor and Preservation Trust of Vermont, the historic Vermont Marble Company facility in Proctor has received two rounds of Phase II ESA work and Corrective Action planning. This work set the stage for a property transfer to the newly created Vermont Marble Museum, a non-profit, which will continue to operate the museum and redevelop the site for other commercial and possible residential uses. Brownfields work at the site was also a driving factor in leveraging a \$30K planning grant from the VCDP to create the Proctor Prosperity Plan, which expanded on work at this site to identify economic development opportunities and strategies in the village core.
- ◆ The RRPC worked on a remediation and redevelopment plan for the former Berwick Hotel site in Downtown Rutland. The site, known locally as "the Pit", has served as a parking lot in

the heart of the city since 1973, when the original building burned. ESA work and redevelopment planning has this site on the verge of redevelopment into a multi-story, mixed-use development, which will expand economic development opportunities and physically complete the street wall, adding to the aesthetics and vibrancy of Downtown Rutland.

- ◆ Assessment work at the former Watkins School in Rutland City has led the way to redevelopment of the former school, which ceased operations in 1978, into 22-units of affordable senior housing by the Housing Trust of Rutland County.
- ◆ Assessment work continues on two high-profile Rutland City sites primed for redevelopment; the White's pool site and former Rutland Plywood property.

### Economic and Community Development

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with towns and in 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.

- ◆ The RRPC assisted local municipalities to plan projects aimed at revitalizing designated villages and downtowns. One example is the work the RRPC has undertaken with the Town of Proctor, using a Brownfields site as key in the plan's development.
- ◆ Completed a Strong Communities-Better Connections study funded by ACCD and VTrans that included the communities of West Rutland and Rutland Tow and Business Route 4 Corridor that connects the two towns. Seven specific economic development recommendations resulted from the study that the two towns are considering for future action.
- ◆ The RRPC assisted the Towns of Pawlet, West Pawlet and West Rutland with their village center designations. The Town of Sudbury will work with the RRPC this year to explore the possibility of designation.
- ◆ RRPC is working with the Town of Castleton on a land use and economic development study to analyze potential commercial and industrial locations for these uses. The VT Route 30 corridor is receiving significant attention with respect to balancing growth and desirable land use patterns.
- ◆ Economic Development Chapters were updated in the Danby, Chittenden, Clarendon, Pawlet, Poultney, Sudbury, Hubbardton, Fair Haven, Brandon and Rutland Town municipal plans.
- ◆ With funding from a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG), RRPC hosted a two day conference on agritourism: Welcoming Customers on Your Farm that was held at a variety of venues around the Rutland Region, including three farms. The conference attracted 100 participants. The grant also help fund the creation of 13 best Management Practices and How-To guides on agritourism. Those guides can be downloaded on a UVM Extension site at: <https://www.uvm.edu/vtagritourism/?Page=guides.html>

### Transportation Planning

Through 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.

**Objective #1 – Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, Regions and Municipalities**

- ◆ The Rutland Region Transportation Council meets on a monthly basis but generally takes the months of July and August off. There is a combined November/December meeting (taking into account the holiday season), when state legislators from the region are also invited. This meeting takes on a mixer format and formal attendance is not taken. From July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016, the TAC met 8 times, with an average participation rate of 47 percent.
- ◆ Held 10 road commissioner/foremen networking meetings, focusing on pertinent issues such as transportation legislation, legal load limits, workplace safety, Tier II reporting.
- ◆ The RRPC completed 10 bridge/culvert inventories, 5 traffic counts, and twice assisted VTrans with Park & Ride counts (one round for state, one for municipal). Road surface inventories are performed for municipalities as part of the Better Roads grant, and sign inventories are done if requested.

**Objective #2 – Conformance with Act 200 and Facilitating Decentralized Decision-Making**

- ◆ The Regional Transportation Plan was adopted in 2015 and is incorporated into the Rutland Regional Plan.
- ◆ Participated in two reviews of Act 250 applications involving transportation issues.

**Objective #3 – Providing Transportation Planning Support to Municipalities**

- ◆ Approximately 41% of the RRPC TPI budget supports municipal planning, in the form of short range planning and public participation and coordination.
  - ◇ Worked with Tinmouth on Capital Improvement Plan as part of Better Roads grant.
  - ◇ Produced road erosion priority segment maps for municipalities.
  - ◇ Through road commissioner meetings, site visits and private meetings, worked with VTrans and DEC to educate municipal officials on transportation implications of Clean Water Act. Assisted towns in acquiring grants for necessary inventories and remediation efforts.
- ◆ Organized the 2016 Vermont Walk/Bike Summit in Rutland, in coordination with VTrans and Rutland Area Physical Activity Coalition.
- ◆ Worked with other RPCs and state officials in creating a Road Erosion Inventory field application; purchased necessary equipment for use in this task.
- ◆ Continued membership on Marble Valley Regional Transit District Board of Commissioners.
- ◆ Coordinated quarterly meetings of regional E&D Public Transit Advisory Committee.
- ◆ Served as project manager for continued expansion of Rutland Creek Path.
- ◆ Continued working with contracted towns on Better Roads grants, and assisted towns in applying for newly expanded grants for FY17 round. RRPC is currently working with 7 towns on 2015-16 grants and is scheduled to work with 11 for the 2016-17 round.

**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 support 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 as needed in special circumstances such as Tropical Storm Irene and other declared disasters.

- ◆ RRPC provided technical assistance and outreach to all towns in completing Local Emergency Operations Plans (LEOPs), including offering an LEOP training session.
- ◆ RRPC provided extensive assistance to 7 towns with preparing single jurisdictional hazard mitigation plans, through a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant as well as an HMGP megagrants. Support for the plans of other municipalities was provided upon request.
- ◆ RRPC supported the Rutland Region LEPC #2 by organizing monthly meetings (including mini-tabletop exercises), coordinating special projects, and keeping LEPC #2 members informed of training and grant opportunities. RRPC lead LEPC # 2 through a full bylaw update (last completed in 2006); and to establish three special task forces to work within the areas of Tier II/ EHS facilities; community engagement; and emergency responders.
- ◆ RRPC hosted bi-monthly roundtables for local emergency management directors and coordinators October through June to disseminate pertinent information, to share best practices, and to provide a platform for municipalities to connect around a common mission.
- ◆ RRPC collected local damage information from towns after significant storm events at the request of Vermont Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.
- ◆ Four RRPC staff were trained to serve in the State Emergency Operations Center, including Incident Command System, SEOC Incident Coordination Team, RPC Local Liaison, and DisasterLAN trainings. Four staff participated in Vigilant Guard.
- ◆ RRPC provided extensive technical assistance to several towns applying for Hazard Mitigation Grants, particularly with benefit-cost analyses for emergency generators and culvert replacements.
- ◆ There are 15 (55%) FEMA Approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plans in Rutland County. There are 10 (37%) expired LHMPs in Rutland County. These expirations will be addressed by the RRPC's "mega-grant."
- ◆ RRPC Staff met with DEC Floodplain manager to present the importance of adopting river corridor language to the Chittenden Planning Commission and Select Board.
- ◆ RRPC attended FEMA's Debris Management training and Continuity of Operations training. RRPC staff attended BACH DA.
- ◆ Twenty-six of the 27 municipalities (96%) in RRPC territory have adopted LEOPs.

### 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.

- ◆ **Bridge and Culvert Inventories** – RRPC GIS staff worked with ten town road departments to collect culvert data using the commission's GPS. RRPC then completed the Inventory, mapping, and updates to [www.VTCulverts.com](http://www.VTCulverts.com) for Castleton, Chittenden, Danby, Middletown Springs, Pittsford, Poultney, Tinmouth, Clarendon, Ira and Pawlet.
- ◆ **Transportation Mapping** – Provided mapping support for several transportation related town

grants. Continue to work on identifying and inventorying town long structures for the region. And we continue to add and update bridge and culvert inventories, as well as performing road erosion inventory assessments for many towns in the region. We also provide maps and support for the statewide Walk and Bike Summit held in Rutland, April 1, 2016.

- ◆ **Emergency Management** – RRPC participated in ICS 200 training, and several training sessions at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), including a full-scale statewide emergency exercise, Vigilant Guard, in which GIS staff filled four shifts and had the opportunity to act as GIS Unit Leader and GIS Unit Assistant.
- ◆ **Flood Resiliency Support** – Provided several towns with maps of their special flood hazard areas and river corridors. Also worked with a few towns to map site specific flood hazards.
- ◆ **Municipal Plans** – Worked with the towns of Clarendon, Pawlet, Hubbardton, Fair Haven, and Brandon: creating municipal plan maps to support their town plan or zoning documents.
- ◆ **Regional Plan** – Continued to update and add maps to the regional plan. Future Land Use, Agriculture, Forestry and several energy maps have been worked on.
- ◆ **Pre-Disaster Mitigation Planning** – In support of ongoing emergency management planning and in an effort to inventory and categorize all hazards and potential hazards, RRPC created a set of three maps for each town: Areas of Local Concern, Hazard Analysis, and a Town Base map. Maps identifying known issues were created and will be used to help alleviate potential problems for Chittenden, Clarendon, Danby, Mount Holly, Sudbury, Tinmouth, and Wallingford.
- ◆ **Rutland Creek Path** - RRPC continues to provide GIS, mapping, and technical support for the project which connects Giorgetti/Pine Hill Park to the College of St. Joseph.
- ◆ **Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program** – RRPC worked with local land owners in several towns on this service.
- ◆ **Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL)** – RRPC worked with RAFFL staff to map out general service areas as well as provide technical, mapping, and plotting support.
- ◆ **Village Center and Downtown Designations** – RRPC updated the Village Center Designations for West Rutland, West Pawlet, Pawlet and Belmont Village in Mount Holly and updated the Downtown Designation for Brandon.
- ◆ **Rutland Economic Development Corp. and Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce** - RRPC worked as part of Mountain Bike and Trail Riding Committee, a large regional collaboration of agencies to promote mountain biking in the region. RRPC created a web site on trail locations and amenities as well as bike shops.
- ◆ **Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport** – RRPC worked with the airport manager to create a set of airspace overlay maps for the town of Rutland, RRPC also updated the airport's grid map. This work also supplemented a presentation by the airport manager to the RRPC TAC.
- ◆ **Sothern Vermont Council on Aging** – RRPC provided a set of maps to support the purchase of a new structure for the agency.

### 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.

Energy issues have dominated the Rutland Region recently, stirring healthy debates and leading towns to update land use and economic development policies. The RRPC played a pivotal role in this process over the last year, significant projects included:

- ◆ The RRPC assisted the towns of Danby, Sudbury, Pawlet, Chittenden and Clarendon to create new energy chapters in their municipal plans. Clearer community standards were developed to guide the Public Service Board during Section 248 project review.
- ◆ The Energy Chapter of the Rutland Regional Plan was updated to reflect current conditions and trends affecting the Rutland Region. Standards for energy generation facilities (solar and wind) were developed to guide the PSB during its review of these projects.
- ◆ RRPC staff worked with the Board to review 15 Section 248 petitions and submitted comments to the Public Service Board. A majority of the projects were for solar electric generation facilities and telecommunications towers.
- ◆ RRPC created solar and wind generation facility checklists as well as model Municipal Plan language to encourage clear concise community standards regarding solar development.
- ◆ Staff has started work on creating an Energy section for the Rutland Regional Plan pursuant to Act 174.

### 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.

- ◆ RRPC contracted with the Town of Rutland to implement stormwater management measures to reduce stormwater pollution in Moon Brook for its MS4 permit from the VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation.
- ◆ Staff are providing outreach assistance for two Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) grants awarded to the Poultney Mettowee NRC. Both are for Stormwater Master Planning; one for Lake Champlain, the other for the Castleton River Headwaters.
- ◆ Staff are assisting VT DEC Watershed Coordinator Ethan Swift with outreach on an updated Tactical Basin Plan for South Lake Champlain Watershed to help address the Vermont Clean Water Initiative and the TMDL for Lake Champlain. Staff are also working to train the region's municipalities on the various other provisions of the Clean Water Initiative, including several upcoming mandatory permits, and funding opportunities.
- ◆ As part of the Clean Water Initiative, RRPC staff are working directly with Castleton and Hubbardton on water quality reclassification and increased protection designations for area waterways. This work is being done through the towns' Municipal Plans.

### Special Projects

- ◆ **High Meadows Fund.** RRPC partnered with the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District to create a watershed-level flood resiliency checklist template that RPCs and towns can use. The collaboration also resulted in a tri-town outreach event to promote flood resiliency in a watershed that was greatly impacted in TS Irene.
- ◆ **RAPAC (Rutland Area Physical Activity Coalition)** RRPC worked with the VT Dept. of Health, Rutland City, Rutland Regional Medical Center, and Mentor Connector on rejuvenating RAPAC and the development of its strategic plan.

- ◆ **Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative (VERI)** RRPC completed work on the VERI project in Brandon to help protect the town's economic center from flooding and fluvial erosion.
- ◆ **MS4 with Rutland Town** RRPC worked with Rutland Town to implement stormwater management measures for its MS4 permit for Moon Brook to reduce stormwater pollution. Public education and outreach work included a stormwater pollution webpage for the town's home page and a brochure that was mailed to all town residents, as well as other educational materials. Public involvement and participation measures included organizing a Rutland County Stream Team and planning three events: rain barrel-making, storm drain marking, and a stream clean-up.

### Administration and Funding

Administration of the RRPC's programs, policies, and finances were managed effectively and efficiently. We completed the FY 2016 Financial and Final Reports as well as Quarterly Reports for the Agency of Commerce and Community Development that included the status of performance measures, budget expenses, and other information. The FY15 Audit was completed and distributed to requesting granting agencies.

RRPC leveraged ACCD funds to provide a match for grants from VTrans, DEMHS and EPA. This enabled the Commission to cover the indirect costs incurred to expand work into diverse areas of planning.

We focused on increasing RRPC's visibility by serving on statewide committees, attending Legislative Breakfasts, newsletters, and increasing our presence on social media. We have also put effort into our brand identity, promotional materials and developing a new website which is set launch in this fall – it is sure to be an effective resource for our towns and beyond. Finally, we enhanced our presence in the Region with Boards such as WIB, REDC, Chamber, The Bus, and Southern Vermont Rutland Region Airport Committee

The RRPC continued to implement recommendations of the approved Strategic Plan for the organization, including the financial and management structure. The products resulting from this review included prioritization of work, improvements and efficiencies, developing a baseline needs assessment, training needs, branding, and promoting the RRPC.

# RRPC at Work: FY 2016

