

SOUTHERN WINDSOR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report

The Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (SWCRPC) is a compact of ten (10) municipalities in east-central Vermont. It was founded in 1966, and is a political subdivision of state government organized under 24 V.S.A. Sub-Chapter 3. The Commission now serves the towns of Andover, Baltimore, Cavendish, Chester, Ludlow, Reading, Springfield, Weathersfield, West Windsor and Windsor. The SWCRPC's activities and programs are governed by a ten-person Board of Commissioners, each appointed by the legislative body of his or her member town, with assistance from up to three "at-large" Commissioners as appointed by the Board of Commissioners. In addition, the Board has the responsibility of hiring staff to carry out the goals and policies of the SWCRPC.

The primary intent of the SWCRPC and its advisory committees has always been to assist with and advocate for the planning and development activities of its member towns. The SWCRPC exists primarily to: provide technical assistance to its member towns; assist in mediating inter-jurisdictional planning and development issues that arise between member communities; facilitate discussion and understanding between local and state entities; develop plans, policies, strategies, and procedures for addressing issues that are regional in scope; assist communities with downtown revitalization and community development projects; annually compile, review, and prioritize regional transportation improvement projects for submission to the Agency of Transportation; and to serve as an information resource for member towns and residents.

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:

- ◆ Provided a range of services to assist with municipal plan updates for Baltimore, Chester, Springfield and Weathersfield.
- ◆ Helped planning commissions to prepare zoning bylaw updates in Reading, Weathersfield, West Windsor and Windsor, and provided guidance on bylaw updates to Ludlow. Assisted Springfield with updates to their zoning district map.
- ◆ Assisted the Town of Springfield, Springfield on the Move and Springfield Chamber to complete a Downtown Master Plan, and supported an effort to implement aspects of the plan through both infrastructure projects and applying for Strong Communities, Better Connections funding.

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.

- ◆ The Regional Plan was last updated in 2014; no updates were necessary this year.
- ◆ Efforts this year to implement the Regional Plan included the following activities:
 - ◇ Organized a presentation on water and wastewater infrastructure funding opportunities for our communities. Followed up with municipalities and Terisa Thomas (DEC) regarding water, stormwater or wastewater system projects that are included in the Regional Plan implementation matrix.
 - ◇ Reviewed all Act 250 applications and Section 248 petitions as each relates to goals and policies in the Regional Plan.
 - ◇ Provided assistance to the Town of Springfield to assist with Valley Street infrastructure improvements.
 - ◇ Assisted Windsor with efforts to repair the Ascutney Mill Dam.
 - ◇ Provided assistance to West Windsor with efforts to purchase the ski resort property and make wastewater improvements in Brownsville.

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.

- ◆ Provided Brownfields assistance for 8 properties in 3 towns, including several Phase II Environmental Site Assessments and the development of Corrective Action Plans.
- ◆ Participated in the BERA process to assist with a complex brownfield cleanup effort for the Jones and Lamson site on Clinton Street in Springfield.
- ◆ Developed an Area-Wide Planning application for the Clinton Street Corridor in Springfield.

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.

- ◆ The SWCRPC and Springfield Regional Development Corporation collaborated to facilitate an economic forum in the Town of Chester.
- ◆ Assisted the towns of Chester and Springfield with successful applications for the Strong Communities, Better Connections program. Both projects involved initiatives to revitalize community centers.
- ◆ Assisted with the environmental review for a CDBG-DR project that involves redevelopment of the Jones and Lamson site in Springfield.
- ◆ Assisted the Springfield Selectboard to develop a Strategic Plan, an effort which included prioritizing future economic development projects.

- ◆ The SWCRPC assessed the region's resilience via available data and completed an economic health report card. Completed an action plan to improve the major issues identified by the report card.
- ◆ Created a comprehensive picture/visualization (map) of the existing status of infrastructure in Windsor and Springfield to better understand the potential land and buildings for development and redevelopment in appropriate areas of town.
- ◆ Created a fact sheet on business funding and technical support fact for distribution.

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

- ◆ **TAC activity**
 - ◇ Total # of meetings held: 7 TAC meetings held.
 - ◇ Average member participation rate (expressed as a % of total TAC membership): 72% average member participation rate.
- ◆ **TAC Outcomes**
 - ◇ Developed a vision for what they want to accomplish as the Southern Windsor County TAC.
 - ◇ Met with the emergency planner to learn about what the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is currently working on and to discuss evacuation routes for the region.
 - ◇ Heard a presentation on and discussed the draft findings of The Current bus route evaluation project.
- ◆ **Other Outreach**
 - ◇ Held 4 regional road foreman meetings.
 - ◇ Participated in 1 Road Safety Audit for the Weathersfield Center Road and VT Route 131 intersection.
 - ◇ Hosted 2 meetings regarding Municipal Roads General Permits.
 - ◇ Conducted 2 field visits for Municipal Roads General Permits – one in Chester and another in Weathersfield.
 - ◇ Facilitated 7 public transportation E&D meetings.
- ◆ **Data collection RPCs do for VTrans**
 - ◇ Completed 2 municipal road condition inventories (Chester, Reading).
 - ◇ Developed or updated 3 municipal bridge and culvert inventories (Chester, Reading, West Windsor).
 - ◇ Conducted 2 road drainage and erosion inventories (Chester, Baltimore).
 - ◇ Performed 32 traffic counts, including speed studies.
 - ◇ Completed 1 intersection turning movement count.

- ◇ Completed 9 bicycle and pedestrian counts in 4 locations.
- ◇ Performed 40 park-and-ride counts (monthly at 3 locations, biannually at 2 locations).

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

◆ **Status of Regional Transportation plan**

- ◇ The Southern Windsor County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was adopted in 2014.
- ◇ The plan is adopted as Volume 2 of the Regional Plan.
- ◇ The plan is reasonably current, we have no immediate plans to update the RTP.

◆ **Participation in Project Development Activities**

- ◇ Participated in 5 project scoping efforts (US 5 Paving in Springfield, Ludlow Bridge 99 deck replacement, Chester Bridge 62 project, Springfield I-91 Bridges 26N&S, Chester State Culvert 52).
- ◇ Attended 1 accelerated bridge project meeting for the Ludlow Bridge 99 deck replacement.
- ◇ Attended 1 preconstruction meeting for the Class 1 town highway paving project.
- ◇ Participated in 2 NHDOT bridge projects that impact our region (Charlestown/Springfield and Cornish/Windsor).

◆ **Participation in Act 250 review related to transportation issues**

- ◇ Reviewed all Act 250 applications received; none had noteworthy transportation issues this year.
- ◇ Continued multi-year participation in an ongoing appeal to an Act 250 permit issued for the Killington Village Master Plan, as it impacts our regional transportation system.
- ◇ Reviewed 2 Section 248 petitions and requested screening for both projects as it relates, in part, to the Connecticut River Scenic Byway.

Objective #3 - Providing Transportation Planning Support to Municipalities

◆ **% of TPI budget (Task # 4 Short Range Transportation Planning) that supports municipal planning?**

- ◇ A significant amount of our TPI activities is for local technical assistance with transportation planning, but this level of effort is difficult to quantify. Task 4 represents 29.4% of our FFY 2016 TPI contract amount. Examples of work performed under Task 4 include:
 - Chester Transportation Capital Improvements Plan;
 - Springfield Downtown Capital Improvements Plan; and,
 - West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.
- ◆ Completed 2 road erosion inventories (Baltimore and Chester).
- ◆ We assisted municipalities with Better Road applications, including 3 applications for Category B, C or D work for Baltimore, Reading and Windsor, as well as 3 Category A applications for Cavendish, Ludlow and Windsor.
- ◆ Special studies completed include:
 - ◇ 2016 Bus Route Evaluation Study; and,
 - ◇ West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.
- ◆ Participation in public transit efforts:
 - ◇ Facilitated regular meetings for the transportation program for elders and persons with disabilities in southern Windsor County and Windham County, in coordination with WRC.
 - ◇ Regularly attended Southeast Vermont Transit Board meetings.

- ◇ Attended Springfield Hospital Community Health Team Transportation Committee meetings.
- ◇ Completed the 2016 Bus Route Evaluation Study.

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. RPCs 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.

- ◆ Ten municipalities in the region (100%) currently have a hazard mitigation plan either adopted or under review. Ten municipalities in the region (100%) currently have an updated local emergency plan.
- ◆ Assisted all 10 towns to update Local Emergency Operations Plans this year.
- ◆ Worked with 6 towns to update Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, including Andover, Cavendish, Chester, Reading, West Windsor and Windsor.
- ◆ Provided support with the buyout of 7 flood-damaged properties.
- ◆ Assisted the Town of Ludlow with their ongoing industrial park resiliency planning effort.
- ◆ Continued to provide guidance to the Town and Village of Ludlow with flood hazard review, as requested.

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 of activities
 - ◇ Creation of a new online GIS portal: <http://swcrpc.maps.arcgis.com>.
 - ◇ Developed online maps showing data from the UAV (drone) flight by UVM for the Popple Dungeon Road relocation in Chester.
 - ◇ Created an interactive online map to support the Reading zoning map update process.
 - ◇ Finalized maps for the Springfield Downtown Master Plan.
 - ◇ Developed an inventory and maps of commercial and industrial lands in Windsor and Springfield.
 - ◇ Developed maps to support applications for Village Center and Downtown Designation.
 - ◇ Gave two GIS/mapping presentations for classes at a local school.
 - ◇ Developed maps for West Windsor's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.

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 imple-

mentation. RPCs participate in Section 248 proceedings and support comprehensive planning at the local and regional level to inform the permitting process.

- ◆ Reviewed documents and participated in Section 248 proceedings, including TDI New England Clean Power Link (Ludlow), VELCO Connecticut River Valley Project (Cavendish and Weathersfield), Mountain Funds (West Windsor), and Ranger Solar (Ludlow).
- ◆ Provided towns with information and guidance regarding Act 174 and the related implications for municipal plans.
- ◆ Assisted the Town of Baltimore to update the Energy Chapter of their Town Plan.

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.

- ◆ Worked with the towns of Reading, West Windsor and Windsor to implement recommendations from the Mill Brook Stream Geomorphic Assessment.
- ◆ Assisted municipalities to better understand flood resiliency and to consider adoption of model ANR river corridor bylaws, including Reading, Springfield, Weathersfield, West Windsor and Windsor.
- ◆ Coordinated with ANR and the Town and Village of Ludlow regarding stream reclassifications.
- ◆ Assisted Springfield to complete the Meadow Drive bank stabilization project.

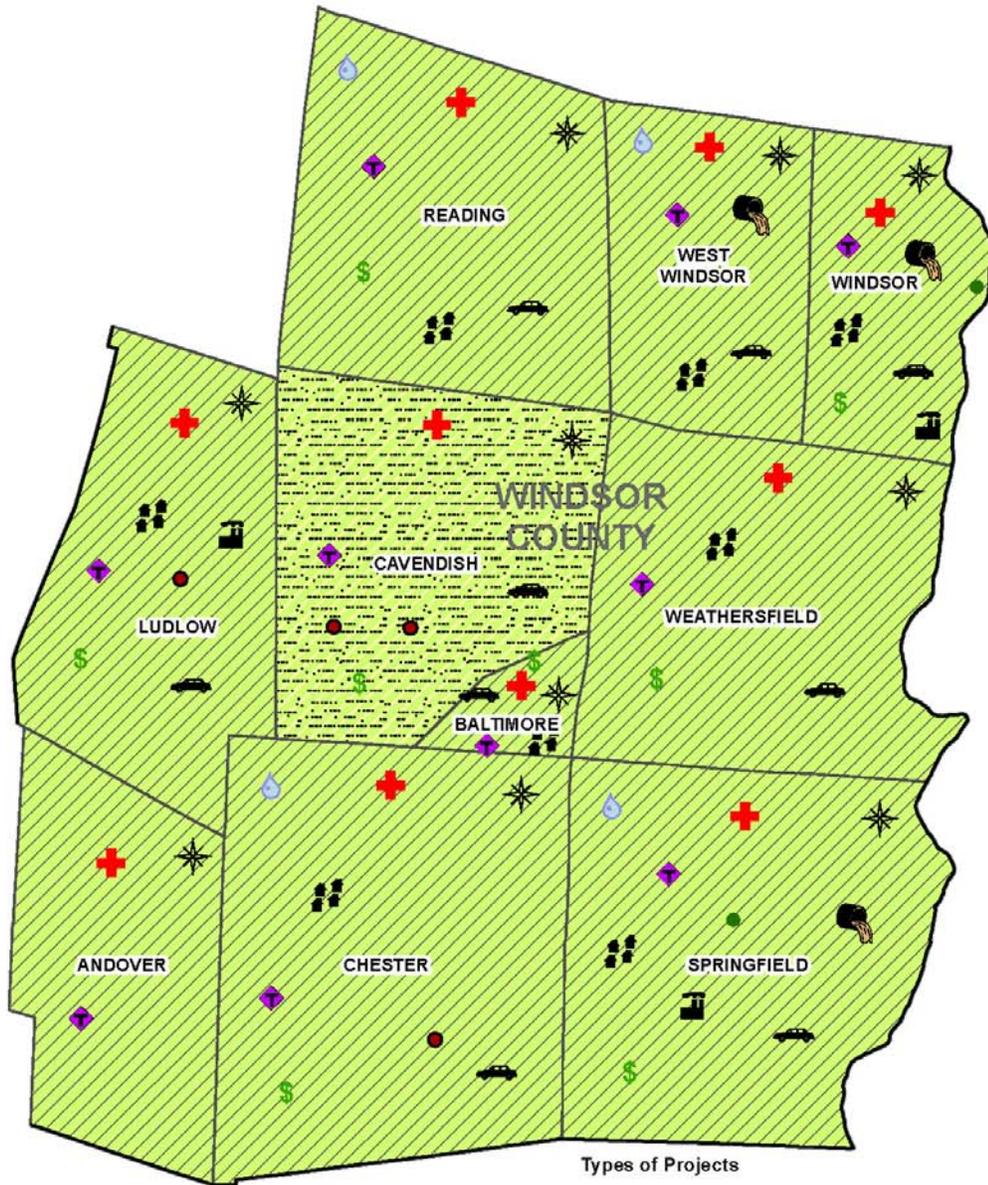
Special Projects

- ◆ The SWCRPC worked collaboratively with TRORC and prevention partnership organizations on healthy community initiatives, including the development of guidance materials to assist local planning efforts to promote public health.

Administration and Funding

- ◆ The SWCRPC is funded by performance and project contracts with federal, state and locals levels of government, foundation support, and contributions from member municipalities. SWCRPC's FY 2016 budget was approximately \$861,825.00 Core funding provided by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development of \$197,225.00 leveraged about \$317,000 in additional federal sources.
- ◆ SWCRPC has an annual independent audit conducted by Certified Public Accountants. A single audit was not necessary for the past fiscal year. No significant findings nor material weaknesses have been identified in recent years.
- ◆ SWCRPC serves 10 municipalities and operates with a Board of Directors that develop and implement policy and oversee a staff of 8.

SWCRPC at Work: FY 2016



**SOUTHERN WINDSOR COUNTY
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

Types of Projects

Assistance

- Bridge and Culvert Inventory
- Brownfield Assistance
- Emergency Planning
- Grant Writing
- Industry Support
- Mapping
- Planning and Zoning Assistance
- Traffic Count
- Transportation Planning Assistance

Designated Downtown or Village

- Designated Downtown
- Designated Village

Zoning Bylaw Status

- Adopted
- Flood Only
- None

Town Plan Status

- Current
- Expired
- No Town Plan
- County Boundary
- Town Boundary