

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report

The Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) provides technical assistance to a 30-town area in east central Vermont. Our primary goals are to advocate for the needs of our member towns, and to articulate a vision for building a thriving and sustainable regional economy while enhancing the region's quality of life. TRORC staff provide technical services to local, state and federal levels of government and to the Region's non-profits and businesses.

Municipal Planning and Implementation

TRORC has a staff with more than 50 years of combined experience providing technical assistance to towns. We regularly field ad hoc questions from zoning administrators and town staff, as well as work under contract on larger projects. Regional Planning Commissions (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:

- ◆ **Hancock Capital Budget and Program** - With a Municipal Planning Grant and our Property Tax Receipts funding, TRORC staff worked with the Town of Hancock to develop its first official Capital Budget and Program. The final project included an inventory of existing facilities and equipment, a prioritization of future projects, a wish list of future projects and a customized building maintenance template for local officials.
- ◆ **Bethel Unified Bylaw** – As a follow-up to the Bethel Town Plan (written with assistance from TRORC), TRORC helped the Bethel Planning Commission develop a unified bylaw which included new restrictions on development within the Flood Hazard and River Corridor areas. The draft Unified Bylaw is currently under consideration by the Selectboard.
- ◆ **Village Center Designations** – TRORC Staff worked closely with the towns of Bradford, Woodstock, Newbury (including Wells River Village), Royalton and Woodstock to renew or apply for Village Center designation. This included guiding communities who were in the process of updating their municipal plans through the process of including material required by the Village Center Program as part of their revisions.
- ◆ **NewVista** – TRORC responded to community concerns regarding the NewVista Foundation's plan to develop 5,000 acres in the towns of Tunbridge, Sharon, Royalton and Strafford into a high-density, mixed-use community with 10,000-20,000 people. We facilitated a large community meeting on the project that was very effective at laying out the existing planning and regulatory processes as well as giving residents a change to share their concerns. In addition,

TRORC staff has been meeting with several communities to provide guidance on how their plans could be modified to better address high-density, mixed-use development in rural areas.

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.

- ◆ **Regional Plan Updates:** All required regional plan updates were completed in FY15. However, the Regional Commission has been developing a chapter entitled “Fostering Healthier Communities.” Its purpose is to facilitate and encourage municipalities to plan for and create vibrant, active places through their built environments that encourage healthy lifestyles with the goal of improving overall health across our communities.
- ◆ **Plan Implementation:** In FY 16, the Regional Plan was most clearly used as part of the Regional Commission’s appeal of the Quechee Highlands 120,000 square foot mixed-use development proposal at Exit 1. Despite a ruling by the Environmental Court overturning the denial of the Quechee Highlands Act 250 permit application, the Regional Commission continues to believe that the project violates clear, written standards in the Plan. Our appeal to the Vermont Supreme Court is currently under review.

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.

- ◆ TRORC was awarded \$400,000 in EPA assessment funds in the fall and has reviewed all known sites in the region with VTDEC, as well as met with our regional development corporation and larger towns to identify their priority sites. We now have a ranked list of sites, are currently finishing a corrective action plan on a site expected to have housing and a transit stop in Hartford, and are talking with other owners.
- ◆ We also assisted with a supplemental redevelopment study for work on the East End in Woodstock.

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 local and regional development groups to this end in a number of ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic gain.

- ◆ TRORC Worked with several organizations around the region to further develop support of the Creative Economy. This included holding a series of meetings and workgroups in the TRORC and Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (SWCRPC) regions to collect public input. In addition, TRORC worked with a consultant to develop a report that acknowledges and supports the strength of creative economy in the region. This has resulted in an action plan to further develop support.

- ◆ TRORC continues to work with East Central Vermont Economic Development District in writing and supporting goals, strategies and actions of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

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 6 of meetings held, average member participation rate 35%(expressed as a % of total TAC membership)
- ◆ **TAC Outcomes**
 - ◇ Chelsea VT110 bridges BR9 and BR11, TAC continuing to stay abreast of the future plans and discussing Town's concern over temporary pedestrian bridge access during construction for summer 2017.
 - ◇ TRORC participated in numerous policy stakeholder meetings as requested by VTrans and other agencies:
 - VTrans LEAN process on Public Information Officer and how this helps communities and VTrans move projects forward.
 - Staff spearheaded RPC road erosion methodology discussion for road erosion inventory collection for summer 2016.
 - Staff participated in FHWA Vermont HSIP review committee.
 - ◇ TAC continuing to be vigilant on paving projects through district leveling and project prioritization, also related with safety with rumble strips and tracking vehicle crashes to VTrans.
- ◆ **Other Outreach** - 3 road foreman/commissioner meetings held, 4 TMDL outreach meetings, 2 Road Safety Audits held, 2 Public Transit E&D meetings held, 5 municipal road surface management or sign inventories.
- ◆ **Data collection RPCs do for VTrans** – 4 bridge/culvert inventories completed, 11 traffic, 16 bike/ped and 3 Park & Ride counts conducted.

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

- ◆ **Status of Regional Transportation plan** – Adopted in September of 2015 as part of the TRORC Regional Plan.
- ◆ **Participation in Project Development Activities** - 4 project scoping efforts, 5 accelerated bridge meetings.
- ◆ **Participation in Act 250 review related to transportation issues** - 3 applications involving transportation issues.

Objective #3 - Providing Transportation Planning Support to Municipalities

- ◆ **34% of TPI budget (Task # 4 Short Range Transportation Planning) supports municipal planning.**
- ◆ **Other Better Roads (BR) - related work** – assisted 12 towns with 17 BR grant applications for 2016 and completed 5 town 2015 BBR road surface management inventories.
- ◆ **Participation in public transit efforts** – TRORC staff participated in Advance Transit’s Strategic Planning Committee, conducted a Bus Stop Inventory Report and participating in the Transit Signal Priority Project with Upper Valley-Lake Sunapee RPC, NHDOT and VTrans. TRORC staff also participated in Stagecoach’s Strategic Planning Committee and Stagecoach’s 40th anniversary planning committee.
- ◆ **Resiliency related work** – In addition to spearheading RPC discussion on road erosion inventory methodology, staff were involved in project management of several town CDBG Disaster Recovery transportation projects (Rochester Bean’s Bridge Road Lowering and Bank Stabilization, Royalton Gilman Road Relocation, Woodstock Snow Dump Relocation and Construction, Barnard Mt Hunger Bank Stabilization, Stockbridge Taggart Hill Road Bank Stabilization and Hancock Churchville Culvert Replacement).
- ◆ Staff attended the Bethel Better Block initiative (the Town received a grant through AARP) to implement short term improvements on Main Street this coming Fall 2016.

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. TRORC’s staff played a strong role in regional emergency response.

- ◆ We assisted the state in its Vigilant Guard exercise and have four staff trained in ICS and other aspects of emergency management. TRORC staff are often tasked by DEMHS to poll towns for disaster damage in the wake of incidents. TRORC also has a very good working relationship with our Vtrans Districts and coordinates with them in times when road damages are expected. We do outreach with our road foremen on disaster recovery and staff our regional LEPC #12.
- ◆ All of our municipalities have updated local emergency operations plans, and two-thirds have approved or final local hazard mitigation plans. The rest have mitigation plans in process. TRORC continues its leadership on flood recovery and effects of climate disruption.
- ◆ TRORC Staff presented in the last year at a Northeast conference on resilience as well as local and state conferences.

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.

- ◆ Updated E911 maps.

- ◆ Updated town plan maps.
- ◆ Supported town asset inventories.
- ◆ Created river corridor and flood resilience project maps.
- ◆ Completed Hazard Mitigation Plan analysis and maps.

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.

- ◆ The Regional Commission reviewed and commented on twenty petitions for a Certificate of Public good within the region, the bulk of which were for solar generation facilities.

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.

- ◆ TRORC continues to play an active role in commenting on water quality initiatives by the state, as well as promoting high quality waters through basin planning processes. We are active in the Basin 10 planning process and in proposed reclassification of waters to A1 and B1.

Special Projects

Use this to described any unique efforts, whether it is your HUD grant, a partnership with your local health department, MS-4 implementation, etc.

- ◆ TRORC continued to administer CDBG-DR funding, have completed over 100 buyouts. Made grants to towns for design of access points/parks at some sites.
- ◆ TRORC is continuing to develop a dashboard as part of the TRORC Strategic Plan. We are carrying forward metrics by creating a regional set of indicators and desired outcomes.

Administration and Funding

TRORC is funded by performance and project contracts with federal, state and locals levels of government, foundation support, and contributions from member municipalities and non-profits. TRORC's FY 16 budget was approximately \$1.2 million, plus a three-year effort of HUD home buyout funding of \$3 million. Core funding passed through by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development of \$280,000 leveraged about \$950,000 in additional federal sources that addressed the needs of citizens and communities in the TRORC region.

TRORC has an independent audit conducted by Certified Public Accountants and has numerous field audits and reviews by funders. No significant findings, material weaknesses, nor questioned costs were identified. Staff continuously avail themselves of professional development opportunities on program and administrative areas.

TRORC serves 30 municipalities and operates with a Board of Directors that develop and implement policy and oversee a staff of 10. The Board systematically updates all accounting practices and safeguards and organizational policies on an ongoing basis.

TRORC at Work: FY 2016

