The Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) serves the 23 municipalities (19 towns, 3 incorporated villages, and 1 city) located in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties in northwestern Vermont.

Municipalities in the region appoint two representatives to serve on the Board of Commissioners. This board governs the policies and activities of the Commission and elects an Executive Committee and officers to oversee NRPC programs and staff. The Mission of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission is:

- To assist local municipalities, through education, technical assistance, grants and funding; and to aid municipalities in their planning efforts as authorized by Vermont planning laws.
- To serve as a center for information and as a resource to support the region and its municipalities’ interests, growth patterns and common goals.
- To provide a forum for the discussion of issues which are regional in nature and/or unique to our area of the state, and to serve as a mediator to resolve conflicts as appropriate. Common sense and a spirit of compromise must be allowed to enter the discussion so that the impacts of development may be mitigated.
- To conduct regional planning programs.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING & 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 on-site training, bylaw modernization, facilitating transition to Development Review Boards and implementing 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:

- Completed workshops attended by municipal staff and volunteers from 19 municipalities on the Essentials of Land Use Planning.
- Reviewed and provided regional approval to 3 municipal plans (Bakersfield, Fairfax, St. Albans Town). Reviewed and provided a positive determination of energy compliance to 3 municipal plans (Fairfax, Franklin, Swanton).
- Completed a substantial update to the development regulations for the Town of Fairfield with Municipal Planning Grant funding. This included a character assessment of the village area and revisions to the Village Zoning District standards. Assisted the Town of Richford complete updates to the municipal development regulations. Assisted the Town of Alburgh in creating development regulations that were voted on by town residents at Town Meeting.
- Assisted North Hero with updates to their municipal plan.
- Helped the Town of Sheldon apply for and receive village designation for its two village centers.
- Finalized a Village Master Plan for the Town and Village of Alburgh. The project was funded through the Municipal Planning Grant program.
• Answered general planning and zoning technical assistance questions for Alburgh, Berkshire, Enosburgh, Enosburg Falls, Fairfax, Fairfield, Fletcher, Franklin, Georgia, Highgate, Montgomery, North Hero, Richford, Sheldon, St. Albans City, St. Albans Town, South Hero, and Swanton.

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 Northwest Regional Plan was amended by the Board of Commissioners in June 2017. The amended plan included a new energy element meant to comply with the new statutory requirements for regional “enhanced energy plans.” It also included adoption of the Regional Energy Plan by reference.

NRPC published an online indicator report with regularly updated online data to show progress on the goals of the regional plan.

NRPC reviews state permit applications to ensure proposed projects conform with the regional plan. The Project Review Committee reviewed seven Section 248 applications and one Act 250 major applications (thirteen Act 250 minor applications) for conformance with the regional plan. The committee made final determinations on eight of the projects and determined they conformed with the plan but in some cases offered comments and suggestions for permit conditions.

BROWNFIELDS

Vermont RPCs have sought and have been awarded over $10 million 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.

NRPC currently has 2 active EPA Brownfields grants, including one Revolving Loan Fund and one assessment grant which is split between hazardous materials and petroleum assessment. During FY19, the following projects were either finished, ongoing or started.

Assessment Projects:
  • **200 Bridge Street, Sheldon.** The Town of Sheldon in cooperation with the Sheldon Historical Society has entered the Brownfields Program and NRPC has funded a phase 1 assessment, ground penetrating radar assessment, QAPP and a phase 2 assessment. Additional phase 2 assessment is needed. The historical society plans to restore the building for use as a museum and office space.
  • **113 Main Street, Richford.** NRPC was hired by the Town of Richford in coordination with the Richford Economic Advancement Corporation to provide project management and coordination of vision and master plan development for 113 Main Street, funded by a Municipal Planning Grant. In coordination with this project the Vermont Brownfields Program funded a Corrective Action Plan. Implementation is dependent on the construction of the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail Extension that is planned to bisect the property.
Cleanup Projects:

- **10 Church Place, Rockingham, VT.** The Town of Rockingham applied for and received cleanup loan funding from the NRPC Cleanup RLF to remediate, demolish and dispose of hazardous building materials in the vacant and destroyed 10 Church Place apartment building. The Town is planning to restore the property to a compatible and beneficial use to the neighborhood.

- **Former Town Garage property, Highgate Center.** The Town of Highgate has entered the Brownfields Program and NRPC has funded a phase 1 assessment, a QAPP and a phase 2 assessment for the Former Machia Estate and the adjacent former town garage property. The Town applied and received cleanup grant funding from the NRPC Cleanup RLF to remediate, demolish and dispose of hazardous building materials in the former Stinehour Café building on the former town garage property. The Town of Highgate developed a master plan for these properties using Vermont Municipal Planning Grant funds and is working on implementing the plan.

- **14 Stebbins Street, St. Albans City.** The property owner of 14 Stebbins Street has entered the Brownfields program and NRPC has funded a phase 1, QAPP, phase 2 assessment and corrective action plan. The property is currently undergoing redevelopment and remediation and the brownfields program is funding oversight and completion reporting for the corrective action plan. The property owner is renovating the space into a ballet studio and apartments.

**ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth is supported best when development efforts are partnered with solid planning functions. RPCs work with municipalities and Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) to this end in several ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic gain.

- NRPC coordinates the [Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD)](#) in partnership with the three RDCs and RPCs in the six northern counties. An advisory board helped to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that was approved by EDA and is updated [annually](#). NRPC serves as the administrative coordinator for NVEDD.

- NRPC provides grant administrative support for Northern Borders Regional Commission grantees.

- Key partner and organizer of In Good Taste, an annual local food event.

- Hosted the *Healthy Roots* gleaning position to capture unused local crops for distribution to food shelves and other regional groups.

- Assisted the City of St. Albans apply for and receive a Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) Planning Grant for pre-development and planning for the expansion of a childcare facility. NRPC is also administering the VCDP Planning Grant on behalf of the City of St. Albans.

- Assisted the Town of Alburgh administer a Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) Planning Grant for pre-development and planning work related to the construction of a new childcare facility. NRPC also assisted Alburgh School District apply for a successful Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) grant to construct the new childcare facility.
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Through contract with the 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
Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities

- # of TAC meetings held: 9
- # of non-municipal TAC members actively engaged in transportation planning via the TAC meetings: 3
- # of municipalities actively engaged in transportation planning: 22
- # of RPC coordination activities with municipalities and VTrans: 9

Objective 2
Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning

- # of regional transportation plans that are current (within 8 years): 1
- # of Act 250 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation: 6
- # of Section 248 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation: 0
- # of coordination activities in support of regional public transit providers: 23
- # of VTrans committees that involves RPC staff participation: 1
- # of regions participating in Project Prioritization: 1

Objective 3
Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities

- # of municipalities participating in road foreman meetings annually: 8
- Total # of programs that RPCs municipalities assisted with transportation related grants: 5
- % of budget spent on municipal technical assistance: 45
- # of municipal transportation inventories conducted: 0
- # of municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition studies completed/undertaken: 3
- # of municipalities assisted with transportation element of municipal/town plan: 3
- # of road erosion inventories in support of the MRGP completed using TPI dollars and using other funding sources: 3

Objective 4
Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long-Range Transportation Plans

- # of data collection activities conducted specifically for VTrans: 6
Transportation Planning Highlights

- NRPC staff coordinated with the Village of Enosburg Falls and the VTrans Rail Division to negotiate a master license agreement for village utility crossings.
- NRPC is completing a marketing and wayfinding project for the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail funded through a successful application for a Northern Border Regional Commission grant.
- NRPC staff provided project management for the Village of Enosburg Falls’ Vermont Better Connections Grant, which funded the Vital Village Master Planning effort.
- NRPC presented at the Franklin County Legislative Breakfast to discuss NRPC’s transportation planning program, activities of the TAC and regional transportation priorities.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & DISASTER RESILIENCY

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, local Emergency Operations Centers, administrative support to the Local Emergency Planning Committees and coordination among Emergency Management Directors, Emergency Management Coordinators, first responders and planners throughout the State. RPC’s also help update floodplain bylaws, write flood resiliency sections of municipal plans and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency operations plans and assist as needed in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene, the Lake Champlain Flooding of 2011, and other state declared and local disasters. Eighteen municipalities (85%) in the region currently have an updated local emergency management plan. Sixteen municipalities (73%) of municipalities in the region currently have a local hazard mitigation plan either adopted or under review. During the last fiscal year, NRPC:

- Staffed the two Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC #4 and #13) within the region, as well as the greater St. Albans Area Incident Management team and Grand Isle County Mutual Aid Association. The activities include improving capacity to respond to all-hazards incidents, ensuring that municipalities have hazard mitigation plans in place, and updating Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs).
- Served as the Local Liaison to municipalities for the Planning Section of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) following severe weather events. Duties include reaching out to local EMDs /EMCs to assess damages, compiling damage assessments in coordination with Vermont Agency of Transportation and Department of Environmental Conservation and reporting local damages to the Planning Section of the SEOC. Work is performed under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Public Safety.
- Served on the State Emergency Response Committee which oversees the states hazard materials program including carrying out the state and federal requirements of the committee.
- Served on the State Individual and Family Assistance Task Force which coordinates immediate and long-term recovery efforts to meet the basic housing and subsistence needs of affected individuals and families following a disaster.
- Provided data and information to municipalities for hazard mitigation grant program applications for transportation infrastructure improvements, emergency generators, home buyouts in hazardous areas and landslide risk analysis study.
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.

- Completed town plan & zoning maps for municipalities updating their plans and bylaws.
- Prepared and updated Village Designation Maps for communities seeking village designation and renewal.
- Completed E911 Community Maps for all municipalities for use by town officials, emergency responders and others.

ENERGY CONSERVATION & 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.

- Drafted enhanced energy plans for Alburgh, Berkshire, Fairfield, Georgia, Grand Isle, Sheldon and South Hero. Reviewed and provided a positive determination of energy compliance to 3 municipal plans (Fairfax, Franklin, Swanton). The enhanced energy plans will allow the municipalities to meet the standards in Act 174 and receive a determination of energy compliance from NRPC.
- Coordinated statewide RPC efforts to provide custom technical assistance to municipalities seeking to meet the standards in Act 174 and updated the “Municipal Enhanced Energy Planning in Vermont – Best Practices and Resources” guide.
- Developed guidelines to determine if a proposed net-metering solar facility site is a “preferred site,” as defined by the state net-metering rules.
- Actively participated in the review of 5 large solar net-metering facilities (500 kW) seeking a Certificate of Public Good from the Public Utility Commission.

WATERSHED PLANNING & PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to assist with completion of the EPA required watershed plans and implementation of the Lake Champlain and Lake Carmi TMDLs. RPCs also work with municipalities to implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions.

- Continued to work with towns developing water quality related language in town plans and bylaws related to shoreline, stream buffers, floodplain and river corridor regulations.
- Presented two property owner trainings that focused on solutions to treat stormwater on private driveways with funding from EPA’s Healthy Communities Program. The project is providing training to landowners on actions for managing stormwater runoff and reducing erosion potential.
- Continued management of 3 municipal stormwater projects with the Clean Water Block Grant program for the following municipalities: City of St. Albans, Town of St. Albans, Town of Franklin.
Completing a project to identify priority transportation related stormwater projects for further design in the Missisquoi Basin. Funded through a grant from the Lake Champlain Basin Program to NRPC.

Completing project development for water quality improvement projects in partnership with six organizations (3 RPCs and 3 watershed organizations). Funded by a VT Department of Environmental Conservation Partnership Block Grant to NRPC.

Completed 2 stormwater treatment design projects for the elementary schools in Highgate and Swanton. These projects identify on-site stormwater management and compliance with the 3-acre permit. Supported through a grant to NRPC from the VT Ecosystem Restoration Program.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Grants in Aid Program
NRPC coordinates a statewide program sponsored by the VT Department of Environmental Conservation. The Municipal Grants in Aid Program provides funding for municipalities to bring segments of roadway into compliance with the Municipal Roads General Permit, which sets standards for road improvements to help decrease runoff. RPCs statewide provided technical assistance to over 200 municipalities in FY19 to advance $2.6 million in construction of new best management practices. Approximately 45 miles of roadway were improved in the first year of the program (FY 18), and a similar amount are anticipated to be improved in subsequent years. For FY19, 212 municipalities signed up to participate in the program. In the NRPC region, 16 municipalities completed local road construction projects that will decrease runoff and lessen stormwater impacts to our waterways.

Planning for Prevention
NRPC partnered with Franklin County Caring Communities to complete a new guide for municipalities addressing prevention. The guide contains concrete actions municipalities can take to support overall community health, including substance abuse prevention, access to healthy foods, and promoting exercise.

Regional Stormwater Education Program
The Town and City of St Albans have partnered with NRPC to manage and implement the public education and outreach components of their MS4 stormwater permit. Outreach materials, a website and landowner and teacher trainings have been developed with the aim of reducing negative impacts of stormwater on water quality.

ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING
NRPC owns its building at 75 Fairfield Street in St. Albans, purchased in 2013. This provides budget certainty and enables NRPC to hold and manage an asset rather than pay rent. Planned renovation costs over the next three years are included in the budget and budget reserves, and the Board has adopted an accelerated mortgage repayment plan. Annual building expenses are projected to decline within ten years of purchase.

A Board adopted reserve fund policy provides guidance for long term financial planning. NRPC maintains Board designated reserve funds to cover operating shortfalls, accrued leave time, building renovations and equipment replacement. The Commission maintains a three-year plan for equipment and software upgrades and replacement.
The FY 19 the NRPC budget was $6.05 million. The Municipal Grants in Aid program accounted for $4.28 million of the budget, leaving an operating budget for NRPC of $1.77 million. Revenue sources included state and federal performance contracts, grants and local assessments. Virtually all the NRPC’s revenue sources are tied to contracts with scopes of work, guidelines and/or performance measures. This means that the NRPC has limited flexibility in how it chooses to use the vast majority of its funding. Funding received through municipal assessments is the exception, which makes this funding stream particularly important because it gives us the greatest latitude to respond to NRPC-identified needs in the region. The grants we receive enable us to work with our towns on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, brownfields redevelopment, energy, and natural resources. Revenue from virtually all federal and state grantors requires non-federal matching funds ranging from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant). Municipal assessments and regional planning funds passed through to NRPC under a performance contract with the Department of Housing and Community Development provide matching funds required by grantors.

An audit is currently underway and will be completed in the fall of 2019. NRPC has had no audit findings in over ten years and as such is considered a ‘low risk’ grantee by federal agencies. Staffing in FY 19 included 8 employees: Executive Director, Assistant Director, Senior Planners (3), Regional Planner, GIS Technician, and Office Administrator. Six of the eight employees have been with NRPC for fifteen years or more. Two AmeriCorps VISTA employees also joined NRPC in FY 19.

‘AT WORK’ MAP
The map depicting the range of services provided by the NRPC to member municipalities is included on the next page.