NVDA is unique in that it combines economic development and planning to deliver a broad array of services to more than 50 communities in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties. Collectively, our planning and economic development staff deliver thousands of hours of technical assistance annually in support of our mission of “improving the quality of life in the Northeast Kingdom through planning, promoting economic development, and preserving the region’s natural environment.”

MUNICIPAL PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

Our region is the most rural in the state, and few of our communities have dedicated planning staff. Nevertheless, the planning needs of our region are varied and complex. Despite our “rural status” the majority of our towns are actively planning. As of September, we have 37 municipalities with current plans, and three more municipalities are in the adoption process. One of those communities – Irasburg – adopted its first-ever plan. The Town of Brunswick – which has been without a plan for more than a decade – is on schedule to adopt a plan as well. Our range of planning services goes well beyond plan writing, zoning assistance, and statutory interpretation. Here is a sampling of our activities in FY2019:

Three Rivers Path Extension and Trailhead Center: NVDA continues to assist the Town of St. Johnsbury with management of this project, which will extend the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail into the heart of St. Johnsbury’s downtown. NVDA has assisted the Town in securing additional funding for cleanup of hazardous materials at the trailhead site, and has funded site assessment activities of a former industrial parcel along the path extension.

This project will serve as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the Bay Street area of downtown St. Johnsbury, with a focus on the river and recreation. Expected outcomes are increased activity in the downtown, improved sales at existing downtown businesses, job growth related to tourism and recreation, and improved quality of life for residents of the densely populated downtown.

Danville “Village to Village” Master Planning: As the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail continues to bring new opportunities for recreation and visitor tourism, the Town of Danville has sought ways to leverage its economic benefits. NVDA is part of a steering committee comprised of representatives from the Town of Danville, VTrans, and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to guide this Better Connections-funded project to completion. “Village to Village” is a master planning effort to connect the Route 2/LVRT corridor between Danville Village and the activity hub at West Danville. This year, the endeavor was aided by a Quick Build for Health grant, which allowed the community to establish bike-friendly amenities along the trail, including a water station and a bicycle repair station at the Danville Train Depot. The community also obtained Village Center Designation for West Danville, the site of many of the proposed upgrades and amenities.

Concord/Burke Recreation Planning: After assisting the Towns of Burke and Concord in securing a consortium MPG, NVDA continues to provide support to a gravel rides-mapping project in the towns of Burke and Concord.
**St. Johnsbury Housing Committee:** NVDA has been providing staff support to the St. Johnsbury Housing Committee, a group working to improve the condition and selection of quality housing in the town. In FY2019 NVDA helped formulate an “Accessibility Modification Incentive Program” intended to increase the number of apartments in town that are accessible to those with mobility impairments, including those associated with age.

**Newport City Waterfront and Main Street Master Plan:** NVDA provided staff support and technical input to the Newport Advisory Committee and VHB Consultant Team to develop Newport’s Waterfront and Main Street Master Plan. With Newport’s location on Lake Memphremagog and its focus on developing the outdoor recreational economy, this plan is intended to serve as a road map to revitalize the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods through better access to the waterfront and better streetscapes for improved pedestrian, cycling and automotive traffic. The plan was awarded a Vermont Public Places Award that recognizes public spaces which have been defined or enriched by planning, design, and regulations that promote positive public uses and benefits.

Other FY2019 highlights include:

- NVDA convened an information session on Opportunity Zones in the Northeast Kingdom, with the intent to increase understanding of this economic development tool, particularly as it might relate to new housing developments. NVDA will continue to provide support to the three OZ towns in the region (Newport City, St. Johnsbury and Lyndon) in formulating a prospectus that can be shared with potential developers and investors.
- Our efforts to revitalize the region’s village centers continued in FY2019, as NVDA helped Coventry, Barnet, and Westfield earn Village Center designation, making tax credits available for important investment projects. To date, we have 28 Village Center Designations. NVDA is currently working with the Towns of Holland, Waterford, and Irasburg on applications and mapping for Village Centers in these communities.
- In FY2019, NVDA staff worked with seven communities to amend municipal plans, some of which included enhanced energy sections that will meet Act 174 standards for receiving substantial deference.: Peacham, Sutton, Norton, Unified Towns & Gores, Holland, Troy, and Burke. Additionally, staff worked with the town of Sutton to develop a community survey that will inform their plan update. Staff also worked with the Town of Westmore to develop screening standards for ground-mounted solar plants.

**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.

**Update - Energy Plan and Regional Plan Amendment:** With a determination of energy compliance from the Department of Public Service, NVDA is able to review and certify local plans in our region who wish to receive Substantial Deference in the Section 248 process. During FY2019, NVDA was able to certify the plans of seven municipalities: Brighton, Charleston, Greensboro, Holland, Irasburg, Morgan, and Westfield. We expect about a half dozen towns to seek Substantial Deference in the coming fiscal year.
NEK Food Cycle Coalition: This group of NVDA staff, NEK Waste Management District, state and local officials, and community development organizers continue to meet monthly at NVDA offices to reduce the loss of edible food by redirecting it to those who need it. The group, which follows Vermont’s hierarchy for food wastes – reducing waste at the source, redirecting it to people, then to animals, compost and energy recovery – recently received a USDA Rural Development grant to conduct a feasibility study for a sustainable food rescue distribution network.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Economic growth is most effective when partnered with solid planning functions. Because we are a fully integrated organization, holistic economic and community development is an NVDA forte.

The Hardwick Yellow Barn Business Accelerator and Corporate Campus (aka “Yellow Barn”) will strengthen Vermont’s farm- and food-based economy by allowing multiple establishments to grow and expand with other entrepreneurs, develop new products, and improve export to external markets. The project will consist of a two-story, 40,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose processing facility and an innovative adaptive reuse of the historic 3,400 sq. ft. yellow barn – already an iconic presence along the Route 15 gateway to downtown Hardwick.

NVDA is an active partner in this unique public-private endeavor to offer best-in-class production and administrative space to new and expanding businesses at highly competitive rates. The CAE operates the Vermont Food Venture Center, a business incubator for farm- and food-based businesses immediately adjacent to the site, making Yellow Barn an ideal next step for incubator graduates. Two long-term anchor tenants are already committed, one of which will establish a local food retail destination. The site is also adjacent to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, ensuring high visibility and market penetration to accelerator tenants. Yellow Barn is scheduled to commence construction in the spring of 2020 and will be ready for full occupancy in 2021.

Vt Quebec Enterprise Initiative: NVDA completed its work with the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce on the VQEI initiative. With funding from the Northern Border Regional Commission, we were able to successfully assist four small Quebec-based businesses to locate to the region. These include Pratiko, Inc., Gilbert Technologies, Miti Manufacturing, and Theo Décor. We were also able to assist through cost-sharing 11 existing manufacturers in the area with employee training through programs offered by the VT Manufacturing Extension Center. Programs included Lean Manufacturing, Structured Problem Solving, Set-up Reduction, and Manager Training. As a result of this, 98 incumbent workers have improved work skills.

Vermont Talent Pipeline: Developing a skilled and ready workforce is a critical issue locally and statewide. In FY2019, NVDA continued to partner in the Vermont Talent Pipeline Management initiative. This effort convenes employers from different industry sectors to identify their industry-specific issues and develop employer-led workforce solutions. The industries that convened during FY2019 remained construction, health care, and advanced manufacturing. Employer Collaboratives were formed for all 3 industry sectors; Needs Assessments were also completed for those sectors; and, Career Ladders have been developed for the Construction and Healthcare sectors. Education providers are beginning to engage in implementing the solutions identified by the employers.
Newport City Renaissance Corporation: In FY2018, NVDA assisted the Newport City Renaissance Corporation d/b/a Newport City Downtown Development, the organization that maintains the City’s designated downtown district, with the process of renewing its downtown designation which it received in February 2018 for an 8-year period. This is Newport’s third downtown designation through the State’s Designation Program which supports local revitalization efforts across the state by providing technical assistance and state funding. In addition, NVDA is assisting the downtown organization to develop funding and staffing strategies, and to develop a strategic focus to create a four-season outdoor recreational economy in Newport. Working with both the Board and the committees, NVDA is assisting the organization to use current studies to design projects that create connections and activities that better link Newport’s Main street to its waterfront as part of the investments in the outdoor recreational economy.

Bluffside Farm: NVDA continues its collaboration with the Vermont Land Trust, the Newport City Renaissance Corporation d/b/a Newport City Downtown Development, and the City of Newport to develop recreational trails on the Bluffside Farm property, owned by VLT since 2015. The project, which is expected to create up to 10 jobs, will link downtown Newport City to the Canadian border, and link to Prouty Beach directly into downtown Newport. This new, 4-season recreational asset will be a direct benefit to these businesses by connecting downtown Newport businesses to a new market of Quebec visitors and consumers who will be drawn directly into Newport’s downtown business district from the trails. The project has obtained more than $1 million in funding from the Northern Border Regional Commission, USDA Rural Development, the Freeman Foundation, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, Vermont Community Foundation, Vermont Land Trust, as well as donations from local businesses and individuals.

City of Newport Outdoor Recreation: NVDA worked with the City of Newport to develop a proposal for the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Community Grant to support the continued work of the City of Newport, the Vermont Land Trust, the Newport City Renaissance Corporation d/b/a Newport City Downtown Development. The City of Newport was one of only two communities selected state-wide to receive the VOREC grant which will support building a critical trail connection between Prouty Beach and Bluffside Farm as part of the City’s Waterfront Recreation Trail and Lake Access project. Newport will serve as a prototype for other cities and towns in Vermont seeking to expand their economies through development of outdoor recreational assets.

Northern Border Regional Commission Grants: NVDA provides grant management support to all recipients of NBRC grants awarded in the Northeast Kingdom. Support includes assistance with reporting, procurement, reimbursements, and tracking of project progress.

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.
NVDA also supports the efforts of Rural Community Transportation with technical, strategic, and advisory expertise. We remain a vital participant on the RCT Board of Directors, where we leverage our many partnerships and collaborations throughout our region to benefit public transit and improve the transportation opportunities for the least fortunate and most in need citizens. RCT is also making efforts to bring awareness of transportation services to the general population.

Objective #1: Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities
- 5 TAC meetings held
- 3 non-municipal TAC members actively engaged in transportation planning
- 45 municipalities actively engaged in transportation planning
- 15 RPC coordination activities with municipalities and VTrans

Objective #2: Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning
- Regional Transportation Plan is current.
- 3 Act 250 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation
- 0 Section 248 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation
- 4 coordination activities in support of regional public transit providers
- 0 VTrans committees that involves RPC staff participation
- Participates in Project Prioritization

Objective #3: Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities
- 43 municipalities participating in road foreman meetings annually
- 6 municipalities assisted with transportation related grants
- 45% of budget spent on municipal technical assistance
- 6 municipal transportation inventories conducted
- 0 municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition studies completed/undertaken
- 7 municipalities assisted with transportation element of municipal/town plan
- 10 road erosion inventories in support of the MRGP completed using TPI dollars and using other funding sources

Objective #4: Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long-Range Transportation Plans
- 40 data collection activities conducted specifically for VTrans

Objective #5: Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education
NVDA facilitates a regional Rivers and Roads Working group made up of DEC Staff, County Conservation District Managers, and VTrans.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & DISASTER RESILIENCY
RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and emergency preparedness through its work with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VT Agency of Transportation, 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 provides assistance with local floodplain bylaws, prepare FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans, and provide assistance as needed in special circumstances such federally declared disasters.

**Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP):** Every community is required to have a Local Emergency Management Plan. Beginning in 2019, the LEMP replaced the Local Emergency Operations Plan. The LEMP requires more information than its predecessor and requires more training from select board members. This has been a challenge to many communities due to select board member's various schedules. NVDA has been able to schedule ICS 402 courses in some communities and have worked with other communities to have a select board member take the ICS 100 course on-line. Every community that NVDA serves has at least one select board member who has completed either the ICS 100 or ICS 402 course. As a result of this effort, we have 20 communities with adopted Local Emergency Management Plans for FY 2019, with five more plans pending adoption by the select board.

**Table Top Exercise:** In FY 2019, NVDA’s Emergency Management Specialist participated (along with multiple agencies and first responders) in a table top exercise at Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital (NVRH). The objective of this exercise was to test the capability of our local hospitals, NVRH and North Country Hospital, as well as our EMS, fire, and law enforcement personnel to handle an incident where patients had to be evacuated from the hospitals. Although the actual exercise was only a few hours, it takes several meetings to plan for something like this to make sure all the agencies that should be involved are participating, and to learn what each agency needs to accomplish in this exercise.

**Local Hazard Management Plans:** NVDA staff assisted with the development of hazard mitigation plans that can minimize losses, as well as out-of-pocket costs in federal disasters. This year Concord, Coventry, Granby, and Peacham adopted Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, bringing the total number of towns with current plans to 23.

**National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP):** NVDA staff met with officials in the Town of Morgan to explore participation in the NFIP, which would make affordable flood insurance available to every resident. Staff also worked with the Town of Westmore to develop flood hazard regulations that would, at a minimum, make the town eligible for participation in the NFIP.

**GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM SERVICES**

GIS mapping supports all aspects of the work done at NVDA. Land Use Planning Maps were produced for Brunswick, Coventry, Morgan, Peacham, Sutton, and Westfield.

This year, there were many towns applying for Village Center Designation. This year included Albany, Barnet, Barton, Brighton, Brownington, Concord, Coventry, Craftsbury, Derby, Hardwick Lyndon, and Wheelock. St Johnsbury also updated their Designated Downtown. In some of the towns there were multiple identified village centers.

Energy mapping was also a top priority in the towns of Burke, Charleston, Danville, Norton, Peacham, Sutton, Westfield, and Westmore.
Numerous maps were produced for grant projects for the towns and for the region. These included a variety of subjects including economic development, recreation, and telecommunications.

**ENERGY CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT**

NVDA integrates energy planning with land use, transportation and natural resources efforts, and economic development to assist with project implementation. We also participate in Section 248 proceedings and support comprehensive planning at the local and regional level to inform the permitting process.

**Local Enhanced Energy Plans:** In FY2019, NVDA worked with Westfield, Greensboro, Irasburg, and Peacham. Our region now has seven municipalities with plans that will receive “substantial deference” in the Section 248 process. This status gives each community a stronger voice in the review process for siting renewable energy projects.

**Local Energy Committees:** Our municipalities continue to advocate for clean and efficient energy at the local level. Danville, Westmore, and Barnet joined the towns of Peacham, Ryegate, Sutton, Glover, and Craftsbury in taking local action for forming energy committees. NVDA worked with Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Northwoods Stewardship Center to host a Regional Energy Forum in Charleston. The March event drew more than 30 attendees. NVDA also worked with the Vermont Natural Resources Council and Heat Squad to co-host a webinar on identifying and financing thermal efficiency strategies.

**WATERSHED PLANNING & PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

Nonpoint source pollution, such as phosphorous loading, is an issue of key concern statewide. NVDA has engaged in a number of partnerships with state agencies, municipalities, and various public and private organization to achieve holistic solutions that focus on local actions with far-ranging impacts.

**Water Quality Advisory Committee:** NVDA’s vast region encompasses six basin plans, while a seventh (the Winooski) touches the region. This year, staff continued the efforts initiated in FY2017 when the Water Quality Advisory Committee was formed. In FY2018 staff collaborated with the committee as well as multiple stakeholders to develop strategic plans to protect or restore specific waters, and identify appropriate funding and resources to complete the work. The work on Basin 17 The Passumpsic River Basin plan are in the final stages of an update. We are joining the initial stages of an update to Basin 14 The Ompompanoosuc, Stevens, Waits and Wells rivers.

**Memphremagog Study Advisory Group:** NVDA participates as a partner with our local municipalities. MSAG is an advisory council assembled by the International Joint Commission to make recommendations for solutions to reducing phosphorus levels in Lake Mempremagog. A phosphorus reduction of 29% is needed to meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards.

**Memphremagog Stormwater Collaborative:** NVDA lends technical and strategic support tp the collaborative. Along with our partners we provide planning and outreach efforts to the communities in the greater Lake Memphremagog watershed.
**Grants in Aid:** NVDA collaborated with the Department of Environmental Conservation, VAPDA, and VTrans to reach out to its member municipalities to participate in the Grants in Aid program, a pilot project which provides funding to municipalities to implement best management practices on municipal roads ahead of the upcoming Municipal Roads General Permit. In FY2019, NVDA directed grants to 34 municipalities in our region, totaling $343,800. Projects are designed to reduce and/or eliminate erosion on municipal roads. Best management practices include stone-lined drainage ditches, and turnouts on steep slopes, other disconnection and infiltration practices. Improvements also stabilized catch basin outlets, addressed gully erosion on Class 4 roads, improved and replaced culverts, removed grader berms and removed high road shoulders.

**Bell Road Project:** NVDA and the Northwoods Stewardship Center partnered to inventory Class 4 segments and identified the Town of Jay’s Bell Road -- a hydrologically connected road segment with a 13% grade -- as a priority project for water quality improvement. NVDA contributed 604b funds, and The Town of Jay covered remaining costs. Work was coordinated between the Town of Jay and Northwoods Stewardship Center’s work crew to reconstruct the road and bridge in order to provide permanent erosion control.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- In FY2019 a coalition comprised of NVDA, the Town of St. Johnsbury and the City of Newport continued implementing their EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant to facilitate redevelopment of aging, underutilized and potentially contaminated properties in the region. Environmental assessment activities that are facilitating redevelopments have been completed or are nearing completion in Albany (community store), Hardwick (business accelerator), Lyndon (park project), Newport (park project), and St. Johnsbury (housing development, recreation path project, distillery, and a commercial building for new businesses).
- In FY2019, NVDA applied for (and received) business program funding from USDA Rural Development to advance local efforts to bring about or improve broadband infrastructure in the region. Funds will be used to establish and/or assist local broadband committees interested in improving their broadband situation. Lyndon and neighboring towns are interested in establishing a Communications Union District that will have the ability to implement locally-driven broadband solutions. USDA funds will aid this effort.

**ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

NVDA’s revenues came from numerous sources, including a share of the state’s property transfer funds; private, state, and federal grants; and annual appropriations from each of our 50+ member communities. We also received rental income from our multi-tenant buildings in St. Johnsbury and Lyndonville, and other income from contracted services, such as grant administration, as well as municipal plan and bylaw development, which is usually funded by Municipal Planning Grants.

NVDA also has two Nonprofit Community Development Organization (NCDO) relending funds capitalized by loan repayments from Community Development Block Grants. NVDA made loans to three businesses in FY2019.

Our FY2018 audit, like previous years, produced no significant findings. Our FY2019 audit will be available in December.
Since 2012, NVDA has published a monthly e-newsletter covering a broad range of news and announcements, training and incentive programs, funding opportunities, a calendar of events, information relating to energy & natural resources, and important updates for municipalities relating to planning, zoning, and economic development. The newsletter mailing list reaches a diverse audience of more than 1,200 individuals within Essex, Orleans, Caledonia counties and beyond. NVDA distributes a quarterly newsletter to nearly 300 stakeholders in the region’s thriving food and agricultural sector. NVDA also maintains a Facebook page for the organization.

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