Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission
FY 2019 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 & IMPLEMENTATION
TRORC has a staff with more than 80 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. We act as a cost-effective professional planning staff for many of our municipalities. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and consultations (on-site training), bylaw modernization, facilitating transition to Development Review Boards and implementing requirements for economic development, flood resiliency, energy and forest resources 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 TRORC at Work map; highlights include:

- Downtown/Village Center Designations - TRORC Staff worked closely with the towns of Bridgewater, Brookfield, Corinth, Rochester and Strafford to renew or apply for state designations.
- TRORC staff worked on comprehensive town plan rewrites with Hancock, Royalton, Topsham, Corinth, Fairlee, Bethel, Granville, Plymouth, Randolph, Braintree, and Rochester.
- In addition to the extensive town plan rewrites above, TRORC provided technical assistance to 13 additional towns related to plan language and bylaws changes.
- TRORC hosted five municipal events in FY19, two on statewide training areas, and three based on regional needs. These events were attended by many types of town officials, representing a wide range of municipalities from our Region.
  - Land Use Decisions (Bradford, VT), with 14 participants
  - Flood Bylaw Administration Training (Woodstock, VT), with 5 participants
  - “How TRORC Works for You” breakfast (South Royalton, VT), with 15 participants
  - Mediation Training (White River Junction, VT), with 9 participants
  - Community Engagement Training (South Royalton, VT), with 11 participants

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: TRORC has continued to eliminate redundancies and update the Regional Plan. In FY19 TRORC started the hearing process for adoption and we fully expect
adoption in early FY20. This update will incorporate new language and maps to protect forest blocks and habitat connects, as well as other new land use designations throughout the Region.

- Regional Plan Implementation: TRORC used the Regional Plan to evaluate applications and participate in the Act 250 and Section 248 projects. In FY 19, forty-three applications were received.

**BROWNFIELDS**

- Environmental site assessments remove concerns about contamination and allow properties to be sold and redeveloped in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs, provide greenspace, and increase housing opportunities.
- TRORC was awarded $400,000 in EPA assessment funds in FY 16 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.
  - Finished an area wide planning project with Hartford for a downtown block.
  - Pre-demolition testing conducted at a site in Bethel for a company expansion.
  - Conducted assessment and prepared corrective action plans for 2 sites in Hartford.
  - Conducted Phase I assessments at 2 sites in Tunbridge (North Tunbridge General Store) and Bridgewater (former Bridgewater School).
  - Assessments conducted at floodplain buyout sites in Pittsfield, Stockbridge, and Cambridge.
- TRORC has been awarded an additional $300,000 in EPA assessment funds through September 2022.

**ECONOMIC & 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 continues to support the Cornerstone Creative Community of Vermont (3CVT) as the Zone Agent to help implement projects related to the creative economy. In FY 19 TRORC held two community meetings and one statewide gathering focused on the creative economy, bringing together over 150 artists and arts organization representatives. Through this effort, TRORC also serves on the statewide Vermont Creative Network as the RPC representative. During FY 19 TRORC worked through a USDA Rural Development grant to build the narrative for promotion of the east central Vermont region.
- TRORC continues to work with East Central Vermont Economic Development District in writing and supporting goals, strategies and actions of our federally approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

**TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

**Objective #1: Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities**
Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) activity - Total of 6 meetings held, average member participation rate 40% (expressed as a % of total TAC membership)

TAC Outcomes
- TRORC participated in numerous policy stakeholder meetings as requested by VTrans and other agencies:
  - VTrans VPSP2 (project prioritization revamping methodology) – 18 meetings.
  - Staff continued RPC road erosion methodology discussion for road erosion inventory collection for summer 2018 and 2019
  - Staff had TAC discussion on the new Town Road and Bridge Standards that incorporated the MRGP standards.

- Other Outreach - Two road foreman/commissioner meetings held, 2 Public Transit Elderly and Disabled meetings held, 2 Vermont Local Road Stakeholder meetings, 3 2020 VT Walk Bike Summit planning committee calls

- Data collection RPCs do for VTrans – 8 bridge/culvert inventories completed, 3 Park & Ride counts conducted, 1 municipal road surface management inventory, 16 Bike ped counts, 25 traffic counts, 27 town complete streets inventory)

Objective #2: Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning
- Status of Regional Transportation Plan – Adopted in July 2017 as part of the TRORC Regional Plan.
- Participation in Project Development Activities - Two project scoping efforts, 2 accelerated bridge meetings.
- Participation in Act 250 review related to transportation issues - none in 2018-2019

Objective #3: Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities
- Fifty percent (50%) of TPI budget (Task # 4 Short Range Transportation Planning) supports municipal planning.
- Other Better Roads (BR) - related work – assisted 30 towns with 28 BR grant applications for 2018 and completed 9 town 2017-2018 BR road erosion and culvert inventories.
- Participation in public transit efforts – TRORC staff continued to participate in Advance Transit’s Strategic Planning Committee and participated in Stagecoach’s changed service routes reflected by mapping technical assistance. TRORC also provided a letter of support for VTrans in applying for a FTA grant for Stagecoach’s future bus barn facility in Bradford which got awarded. Staff participating on the project stakeholder group. TRORC provided letter of support for the Vermont Agency of Transportation’s application to the Federal Transit Administration’s LONO program to purchase battery-electric buses for Advance Transit which was also successfully awarded.
- Staff worked with the Town of Fairlee and assisted with the grant application for the Better Connections grant (successfully awarded).
• Staff provided technical assistance and coordination efforts during the April 15, 2019 flood disaster with VTrans Districts, FEMA and VEM. Staff participated in FEMA town kick off meetings invited by towns.

**EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & DISASTER RESILIENCY**

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness and recovery phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, 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, help communities access grant funds, arrange training, 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.

- TRORC staff are often tasked by VEM 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 we staff our regional LEPC #12.
- Most (27) of our municipalities have updated local emergency management plans, and TRORC staff went out to assist towns transitioning to this new plan format.
- Writing Hazard Mitigation Plans for our towns.
  - Overall in TRORC Region: 29 Towns with Final Approval by FEMA for Local Hazard Mitigation Plans.
  - TRORC staff are working with three communities on updating their Plan, and 1 town is pending FEMA approval.
- TRORC staff was appointed to the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) to represent regional planning commissions.
- TRORC has worked with Norwich and Royalton to plan for and conduct tabletop exercise, and worked with Tunbridge to bring emergency services together to form a new plan.
- TRORC continued its lead role in providing HUD and VHCB funds from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for buying out flood damaged properties.
- TRORC led a statewide hazardous materials commodity flow study.
- TRORC staff updated their Tier II mapping project and disseminated the new maps to member towns.
- TRORC staff were trained to be staff in the State Emergency Operations Center.

**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.

- Produced custom maps for town requests (EAB, road name, infrastructure atlases etc.).
- Updated town plan maps and zoning maps.
- Supported town asset inventories (culvert, road erosion).
- Supported parcel mapping project with town outreach
- Uploaded Regional Future Land use and updated town zoning layer to VCGI portal
• Completed regional plan maps.
• Completed Hazard Mitigation Plan analysis and maps.
• Act 174 renewable energy generation maps

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.

• TRORC has continued to update and maintain town energy data reports and energy resource maps that align with the data needed for Act 174 compliant plans.
• TRORC reviewed or commented on nine petitions for a Certificate of Public Good within the region, the bulk of which were for solar projects.
• TRORC provided technical assistance to six municipalities towards draft enhanced energy plans: Corinth, Fairlee, Hancock, Hartland, Rochester and Royalton.
• TRORC continues to work with partners on regional energy planning implementation through participation with Efficiency Vermont, Vital Communities Energy Advisory Committee, and Green Mountain Power programming.

WATERSHED PLANNING & 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 have remained active in both the Basin 9 and 14 planning processes and have supported the implementation of water quality initiatives identified through the most recent Basin 10 planning process. We have also remained active in Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) designations as well as reclassification of waters to A1 or B1.
• TRORC continues to coordinate our Clean Water Advisory Council (CWAC) which plays an active role in advising TRORC activities. The CWAC provides local and regional input regarding storm water, groundwater, wetlands, stream stability, project priorities, and other water quality issues.
• Developed Flood Resilience Elements for Town Plans that identify streams, rivers, infrastructure and properties in town that vulnerable to flooding and/or fluvial erosion and designates these areas for future protection. TRORC also held a Flood Bylaw Administration Training to support Zoning Administrators in their work regarding flood regulations.
• Through the Our Ottauquechee Project, TRORC worked to promote clean water and increase the visibility and accessibility of the Ottauquechee River. This initiative provided outreach to riparian landowners, included various outreach events that featured the use of the River Flume Table and identified a buffer planting project that occurred at Billings Farm earlier this spring.
• The Ayers Brook River Corridor and Watershed Outreach Easement Acquisition Feasibility Project identified river corridor easements, best management practices and green stormwater initiative projects throughout the Ayers Brook watershed, a stressed tributary to the Third Branch of the White River.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

• TRORC continues in its role as the statewide coordinator of CDBG-DR funding for the buyout of flood damaged structures, having completed over 150 buyouts statewide. TRORC has also managed 12 buyouts that have been redesigned as river access points or parks.
• TRORC has continued to partner with the Mt. Ascutney Prevention Partnership (MAPP) in working with communities on policies that focus on healthy communities. In FY 19, TRORC further refined a health chapter template for towns to use as part of a larger health and wellness toolkit for communities. TRORC has presented and shared this health chapter template to planning commissions, select boards, and other Upper Valley health groups.

ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING
TRORC is funded by performance and project contracts with federal, state and local levels of government, foundation support, and contributions from member municipalities and non-profits. TRORC’s FY 19 budget was approximately $2.2 million. Property Transfer Tax 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 created a non-profit arm in FY 19 to complement and further the work of TRORC and access national foundation funding on emerging topics.

TRORC had a Single Audit conducted by an independent Certified Public Accounting firm 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.

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