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Vermont Regional Planning Commission Capacity in COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Introduction

In the absence of county government, Vermont's 11 regional planning commissions (RPCs) serve as the essential link between local, state, and federal government. With our collective workforce of approximately 100 professional employees, we help municipalities access state and federal programs, respond to state and federal policies, and manage projects across a broad array of areas including emergency planning, community and economic development, land use, transportation, energy, natural resources, and water quality. We also advise and assist with a number of municipal functions. We are political subdivisions of the state (Title 24, Chapter 117), composed principally of commissioners appointed by municipal legislative bodies. Our funding comes primarily from performance-based grants, and a number of us manage revolving loan funds. Municipal assessments constitute approximately 5-6 percent of our annual budgets.

COVID-19 Response to Date

RPCs are uniquely positioned to respond to both statewide and intensely local needs. Our individual and collective response to the pandemic builds upon the experience and skill sets developed in response to Irene and subsequent disasters. All RPCs have:

- Assisted local municipalities with continuity of government operations, communicating needs to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), and accessing the FEMA application process.
- Provided staff support to the SEOC.
- Communicated what resources are available to communities and individuals within the regions and at the state-level, and provided assistance to access these resources.
- Facilitating situational awareness among municipalities within our regions.
- On our own, or in collaboration and coordination with regional development corporations (RDCs), communicated business needs to the state and assisted businesses with access to economic and unemployment mitigation programs.
- Continued work in all of our programmatic areas.

Ongoing Response and Recovery

We recognize that pandemic response and recovery will be concurrent. In addition to our traditional roles, RPCs have the ability to adapt to meet known and as yet undefined needs in our regions and

statewide. We also have the ability to quickly respond to federal initiatives as we did in the wake of the great recession and Tropical Storm Irene. These could include the following, among other things.

- Provide contact tracing assistance.
- Harness our federal grant application, project management, and fiscal agent experience and capacity on behalf of our municipalities.
- Recovery business planning as leader, or in partnership with, our regional RDCs.
- Identifying and developing projects in response to federal stimulus programs.
- Provide planning assistance to implement cellular and broadband connectivity projects at both the community and household-scale.
- Convening human service providers in our regions to facilitate communication and coordination among them and connecting them to municipal emergency management directors, and assisting with logistics planning.
- Advising on the modernization of Vermont's permitting processes.
- Developing regional strategies to take advantage of potential migration to the state, while also doing the necessary planning and project development to ensure state, regional, and local compact settlement policy is realized, and that the local workforce is prepared for related jobs.
- Further collaboration with energy efficiency utilities to meet what will likely be an increased demand for weatherization needs, while also ensuring new development meets state, regional, and local greenhouse gas reduction and renewable energy transition goals.

The first duty of Vermont's RPCs under statute is to promote the mutual cooperation of our municipalities and assist and advise municipalities, compacts, and authorities within the region to facilitate economic development programs for the appropriate development, improvement, protection, and preservation of the region's physical and human resources. This responsibility has perhaps never been as great. We stand ready to serve our municipalities and the state.

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