



MEMO

To: Central Vermont Regional Commissioners

From: Regional Plan Draft Review Committee

RE: Recommended Alternative to the Regional Housing Distribution Plan

The CVRPC 2008 Regional Plan includes a Regional Housing Distribution Plan that was developed through the work of a Housing Committee over the course of 2006-2008. The Distribution Plan in its final form set out to address the following issues:

- forecasts that larger towns would contribute lower percentages to the regional housing total through the year 2020
- each municipality contribute towards meeting the total housing demands of the region at similar rates as the year 2000
- statutory requirements to identify housing needs for all economic groups in the region and its communities, and promote the development of housing suitable to meet those needs (Ch. 117 Sections 4347 and 4348(a)(9))

The process of developing a revised Regional Plan Housing Element has included analysis and review to determine if these issues are still of concern for the region, and if continuation of a Housing Distribution Plan is an effective approach to addressing such issues. The Regional Plan Draft Review Committee (DRC) recommends discontinuing the Housing Distribution Plan. Although some contribution issues are still present, alternative approaches will allow the Regional Commission to more effectively leverage its role and resources to meet regional housing needs.

An analysis of housing growth by municipality demonstrates that larger towns, namely Montpelier and Barre City, experienced decreases in their share of total regional housing units between 2000 and 2010 (see chart below). Other towns, specifically Northfield and Plainfield, which were forecasted in the Housing Distribution Plan to contribute lower percentages, did not experience notable decreases in their share of total units from 2000-2010. These two towns, like the majority in the region, continued to contribute similar shares of housing units.



To determine the level of concern from municipalities regarding contribution toward meeting regional housing demand, CVRPC staff also conducted a review of municipal plans. Plans were reviewed for discussion of these issues, as well as any other discussion of the interplay between municipalities on housing issues. No municipalities cited concerns that the contributions of other municipalities (or lack thereof) would have repercussions for their community.

The majority of towns, however, acknowledge that they are part of regional or sub-regional forces affecting housing in their municipality. They may also add to these forces themselves, therefore affecting other municipalities. This creates unique combinations of housing challenges for each municipality. Groups of municipalities also share in experiencing common pressures. Regional and sub-regional challenges affecting housing production and meeting housing needs identified included:

- housing needs generated by activity in centers such as Montpelier, Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin, Waterbury, Chittenden County, Hardwick and Morrisville create pressures in other towns
- demand for seasonal and/or vacation homes in and around ski resort and tourism industry municipalities
- meeting needs for seasonal workforce housing in ski resort and nearby communities
- development pressure is increased because community does not have land use regulations, but all surrounding municipalities do
- demand for year-round and/or seasonal homes that threatens rural character

Communities around the region are less so focused on the contributions of other municipalities and more so on the root issues themselves that affect housing in their municipality, and the interplay between municipalities. As these forces permeate municipal boundaries, municipalities can achieve more influence on their situation by collaborating with neighbors, rather than attempting to individually change a situation over which they do not have complete control.

When making decisions about how to meet housing demand, communities also must overcome challenges beyond the choices of “How many?” and “Where?” Housing concerns deal with the cost of units, privacy, aesthetics, natural resource and working lands conservation and other issues. In order to effectively meet local housing demand and contribute to meeting regional housing demand, municipalities must be equipped with tools and expertise to address the specific challenge.

The Regional Housing Distribution Plan is effective at setting a benchmark, however, it does not encourage municipalities to collaborate, or equip them with tools and expertise to meet the challenges inhibiting or driving housing production. Communities are provided with a goal, or finish line, to get to with the housing demand projections provided in the Distribution Plan. The goals are required by individual municipality, which does not encourage collaboration toward achieving a mutual goal. If not equipped with tools and expertise to overcome local challenges to housing production, individual municipalities also struggle with how to plan for their given projection effectively. Although the issues raised by the Regional Housing Distribution Plan are still present, they can be more effectively addressed by leveraging regional influence in alternative ways.

CVRPC has staff capacity for municipal technical assistance, networking, coordination and facilitation, securing funding, grant and project management and other services. Its role as an inter-municipal forum also puts it in an ideal position to facilitate collaboration among municipalities. The following alternative to the Housing

Distribution Plan is proposed to devote CVRPC resources to addressing inter-municipal housing issues and the challenges municipalities face for meeting local and regional housing needs. The recommendation will be pursued as an implementation action under the 2016 Central Vermont Regional Plan (see attachment outlining Draft Housing Element revisions).

Action: Provide consultation to sub-regions of municipalities on the issues they face in contributing to regional housing needs

CVRPC will conduct one consultation per year. Criteria for delineation of sub-regional boundaries will be developed by an ad-hoc working group. This group will also prioritize the order in which sub-regions will be consulted, and define specific services consultation will provide. To help sub-regions better understand the housing issues which connect them, and provide the appropriate tools and expertise to address concerns specific to that sub-region, consultations could include the following:

- Staff review of Municipal Plan Housing Elements to identify common barriers affecting contribution to regional housing needs
- Staff research and analysis to better characterize identified issues (information can be included in Municipal Plans)
- Forum of sub-regional housing stakeholders & municipal officials to further identify issues and strategies to address them
- Recommendations that can be incorporated into Municipal Plans and/or pursued through further sub-regional collaboration

It is anticipated that these sub-regional consultations will help nearby municipalities and the region to more closely understand the housing issues that connect them and most importantly, prioritize those most likely to effect progress. Areas necessitating further investigation may be targeted for regional or sub-regional inventory or analysis. Topics worthy of concerted or region wide planning education can also be clarified. Sub-regions will also have the opportunity to prioritize Municipal Plan revision necessities, opportunities to enhance land use regulations, and non-regulatory projects that support meeting both local, sub-regional and regional housing needs.