

Executive Director's Report

November 24, 2015

Perspective: Regional Plan Housing Element

As I've participated in or listened to housing discussions with staff, Commissioners, and local officials, I've asked myself and others what the most appropriate tools are that CVRPC can use to reach its housing goals and what those goals should be. The answer lies in whether the Commission intends to affect market-driven housing patterns, and, if so, how?

Federal policy changed the nation's housing pattern in the 1940s. Prior to that, the majority of the US population lived in tightly clustered urban centers, and rural areas often suffered from abject poverty. The Veteran's Administration home loan guarantee program increased housing construction and initiated an exodus to suburban areas; urban areas subsequently declined.¹ A suburban exodus followed in the 1960s when a back-to-the-land movement shifted young suburbanites to rural areas. Today's State and Federal housing policies are aimed at bringing residents back into downtowns and village centers, which reduces infrastructure costs, maximizes government service delivery, and assists in establishing social connections among residents.

Vermont employers emphasize that the availability and quality of affordable housing affects their ability to recruit a workforce. It impacts younger workers (who earn less) and an aging population (whose mobility declines substantially after age 70). Together, these factors have driven a statewide focus on providing housing options that are affordable. As the Commission forms its housing policy and actions, Commissioners will discuss the complex balance of all these factors. Staff will provide data, trends, challenges, and opportunities; the policy decisions are yours. I hope you will dig into the information, and consider how it affects your community and the region as a whole.

Legislative: 10-Year Municipal Planning Cycle

During the 2014 Legislative session, Rep. Rebecca Ellis introduced a bill (H.367) to change the requirements related to municipal land use plans. As passed by the House, the bill would:

- change the requirement to adopt municipal land use plans from five to 10 years;
- allow plan amendments during this 10-year period without affecting the plan's expiration date;
- require a five-year interim review of the plan;
- require consultation with the regional planning commission at least twice during the 10-year period; and
- clarify requirements for municipal plan amendments, updates, and readoption.

¹ US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, *HUD Interactive Timeline*, http://www.huduser.gov/hud_timeline/

The bill is currently in the Senate Rules Committee. Summer and fall discussions have focused on finding an appropriate balance among parties interested in insuring relevant planning continues to happen in all communities. For the most part, municipalities with planning staff support a 10-year plan cycle to increase municipal plan implementation actions.

Voiced concerns include:

- whether municipalities without staff can maintain planning progress, and if not, would RPCs be asked to shoulder increased work;
- how accountability for planning and implementation would occur. Some State incentives and funding are tied to planning progress;
- whether RPCs would have authority to say municipal implementation actions are insufficient (RPCs are not seeking, and do not want this authority)

I anticipate agreements will be reached prior to the Legislature resuming its work. I welcome any thoughts Commissioners may want to add to the discussion.

Regional Energy Planning

As mentioned in the November Director's report, three Regional Planning Commissions are piloting a regional energy planning effort with the Public Service Department. CVRPC has been requested to participate in the next tier of RPCs. If it agrees, work would begin in ~January 2016.

Earlier this month, Eric participated in the Northwest RPC's community engagement meeting to better understand the project and assist in assessing whether CVRPC can commit. The 18-month effort uses scenario-based modeling to project a region's future energy supply and demand by energy sector (transportation, residential, industrial, commercial). Community engagement is used to make decisions regarding how a region can achieve its proportional share of Vermont's energy goals. The individual regional projects outline actions each region will take to collectively transform the way its uses and produces energy in electric, transportation, and heating sectors.

This project is not about energy siting, although siting discussions do occur when participants review where energy generation projects could potentially be cited based on regional refinements to the Vermont Energy Atlas. This project IS about helping all of us understand whether and how Vermont can achieve its goal of 90% renewable energy across all sectors by 2050, and if it cannot, what tradeoffs each region's citizens are willing to make to produce achievable goals.