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The Stories of 2020

COVID Updates

CVRPC and Partners Embark on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

In early 2020, COVID-19 quickly impacted the entire United States economy; people lost their jobs, businesses closed, and investment slowed. As the federal government began funding programs to alleviate these impacts, regional planning commissions and economic development corporations in western and Central Vermont collaborated to plan for the economic future of their shared regions.



The team applied for a grant from the Economic Development Administration to develop an economic strategy that aligns public and private sector investment in Addison, Chittenden, Orange, Rutland, and Washington Counties. To develop a unified economic strategy, partners will engage local stakeholders in conversations about what actions will lead to the desired economic development in this region. Local strategies will be used as a springboard for shared regional goals.

This large region is home to major economic centers in Vermont, as well as rural working lands that make the region an attractive place to live and work. Over 18 months, CVRPC will be seeking local input from individuals, business owners, municipal leaders, and industry partners about their perspectives on the regional economy, especially post-COVID. By engaging these groups, the partners will create an environment for regional economic prosperity across the West and Central Vermont region.

For more information on the Comprehensive Economy Development Strategy (CEDS), please contact Zachary Maia at maia@cvregion.com.

Walking the Roads of Central Vermont

I walked over 150 miles of Central Vermont's roads last summer and fall looking for road erosion, particularly the kind of erosion that



might impair water quality. The extra sediment from eroding roads and ditches that could end up in streams, rivers, ponds, and the Winooski River which flows into Lake Champlain. There, and in other lakes, phosphorus and nutrients in the sediment feed the toxic harmful algae blooms. Towns use CVRPC services for road erosion

inventories. Road erosion causes concerns for drivers and is a public and environmental health concern. Thankfully, road management best management practices can reduce the amount of erosion that happens or trap sediment before it flows into a stream.

The roads we walked were the segments that run along or crossed streams, rivers, and ponds. They are called "hydrologically connected roads". Many of them were gravel roads, but we also walked paved roads and even ones with curbs and catch basins. The best management practices we looked for included a gravel road that is properly crowned and has no berm or buildup along the shoulder that would prevent water from running off the road. We also checked that ditching is stable and lined with vegetation or stones, and that culverts running under the road and under driveways adjacent to the public road are stable. Due to the mountainous topography of Central Vermont, many of the roads are steep. Not only did they prove a challenge to hike up in the heat of the summer, but also water can flow very quickly down them and create dramatic erosion concerns.

In 2020, CVRPC completed road erosion inventories in seven towns. Inventories are the first step in improving water quality. Once areas of concern are identified, CVRPC works with towns to prioritize segments for improvement and to link towns with available funding for the projects.

Stop! Self-Check, Sign-In & Sanitize

While it sounds like the refrain to a song, it is instead the new routine. March 16, 2020 dawned a new world for CVRPC and the rest of Vermont as Governor Scott ordered us all to Stay Home & Stay Safe. CVRPC staff pivoted to remote work in order to continue to provide services to our municipalities and the team proved resilient in making CVRPC's transition efficient.

In late spring 2020, we adjusted to the start of field work and traffic in and out of the office by staff. This meant COVID entry preparation - schedules were established, supplies sourced, and signs posted. Gone were the days of enter at will. Now entry into our office involves hand washing, temperature check, health screening, log in and, of course, ongoing sanitizing.

The CVRPC team is here to assist municipalities as we all continue to navigate these uncharted waters. Being innovative, resilient, and hopeful as we go! Share with us photos and stories of how your office has changed due to COVID and we will post to our Facebook page and share your best practice and tips with other municipalities - chartrand@cvregion.com



Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid Program

As with everything in 2020, CVRPC's field work and



municipal roads work got off to a slow start. Local and regional project work was put on hold during the initial weather warmup. Road crews prioritized work within their mud season and summer activities, and CVRPC conducted site visits for the Grants-in-Aid program as soon as the State gave the okay and municipalities were ready. Work progressed for all towns awarded 2020 grants. With Dan Currier's departure, Ashley Andrews stepped in as CVRPC's Grants in Aid project leader, providing coaching and advice to towns. Several hadn't applied for the Municipal Grants-in-

Aid Program funds before. Thanks to all the Towns for their hard work and to the Northwest RPC (statewide program lead) for responding to questions!

Initiated in FY18, the Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid program provides funding for municipalities to construct best management practices (BMPs) on municipal roads to support compliance with the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP). Examples of projects included ditching, berm removal, creation of retention pools near streams, and ledge removal.

2021 Municipal Roads Grants-In-Aid funding is available. New for FY21, 11 Central Vermont municipalities in the Winooski Watershed are eligible for funding for equipment grants to purchase hydro seeders, leaf blowers, shoulder discs, or plate compactors.

Please contact Ashley Andrews at andrews@cvregion.com if you have any questions.

Energy Efficiency Rolls On, Despite COVID Changes

Photo Credit: Capstone Community Action

What used to be an evening of pizza, handshakes, and conversations quickly turned into virtual meetings and technical difficulties early in 2020. This didn't stop CVRPC from partnering with Waterbury LEAP, Capstone Community Action, Energy Action Network, and the Department of Forests Parks and Recreation to provide educational presentations and roundtables about energy efficiency. Promoting local education and creating spaces for local energy leaders to learn from one another has increased understanding of the best ways to create an impact.



Efficiency Vermont is still offering [great rebates](#) on a variety of products and services for homeowners, business-owners, or owners of rental units. Capstone Community Action's [low income weatherization and EnergySmart programs](#) are still offering assistance. With the passage of the Energy Efficiency Modernization Act, Efficiency Vermont will begin work on [transportation projects](#) into 2021. There's plenty of momentum for energy improvements into the future!

For more information on ways to save money and energy, please contact your [local energy committee](#) or Zachary Maia at maia@cvregion.com.

A Day in the Field

Photo Credit: UVM

As an intern with CVRPC, most of my days are spent



outside in rural and urban environments gathering inventory and data for towns regarding bridge and culverts and road erosion. On this day, however, I was not surveying the conditions of bridges and culverts, nor was I measuring slopes and checking road drainage. I was outside in my current hometown of Montpelier standing in a small alleyway near a bridge that crosses the Winooski River gathering data on bus stops. Though it seems improbable, there is a bus stop in this dark and mysterious alleyway. It is almost too narrow for a car to pass so how could a bus pull through this area?

CVRPC was assisting Green Mountain Transit, which will use the inventory to build policies about where and when to install stops and amenities. A large part of the bus stop inventory required assessing the safety of the bus stops. Was the stop near an intersection? Was there a landing pad? Was there enough space to pull out? Was the stop shaded? Was there a shelter nearby? As I went through these questions I started to realize that not all bus stops are created equal. Some are in poor condition near busy streets that are difficult to cross. Some have shelters, sometimes occupied by folks engaging in questionable activities. There also are the more popular ones in great locations and good condition. I would never have noticed this disparity if I had not taken this inventory.

I often spend time daydreaming of carbon free car-less cities with space only for cyclists, runners, joggers, and walkers. In my advocacy for active transportation, I often lose sight of what transportation in a city could look like if there was an integrated and comprehensive public bus system. When the sidewalks become too icy and the road grades too steep to pedal up, most of us jump in our individual cars and drive wherever we need to go. The bus provides a bridge. It is a transition between the bike and the car. With COVID, transit systems continue to be innovative to limit interaction, while becoming the transportation of the future.

If I could describe my work with CVRPC in one word, it would be *perspective*. I will never look at a culvert the same way and I will never walk or run up a steep gravel road without first checking for proper ditching and a healthy conveyance. I also will never look at a bus stop post and assume that it is accessible or feels safe. My greatest moments of inspiration and change come from exploring the surrounding landscape and engaging in outdoor activity. I am very thankful for the opportunity to explore, move, and learn. In the age of COVID, moments like these can be hard to come by, but they aren't unattainable.

Cabot Develops Emergency Health Order

Photo Credit: Wikimedia

After months of social distancing, Cabot residents were eager to resume in-person meetings in the Town's Willey Building. The building had been closed for months other than for appointments or curbside services to ensure people interacted in safe and healthy ways.



In early October, Cabot's Emergency Management Director Jenn Miner reached out to CVRPC requesting guidance to sort through requirements on temperature checks, health screenings and sanitation procedures. To assist Jenn, Emergency Planner Grace Vinson reviewed guidance from State agencies and gathered information from neighboring municipalities. With this guidance the Cabot Selectboard was able to adopt an [emergency health order](#) that enhanced safety in interactions between the public and Town officials.

Contact Grace at vinson@cvregion.com if your community would like assistance with developing COVID-related policies or plans.



Central Vermont Cell Coverage Got Your Head Spinning?

Photo Credit: Quickmeme.com

For many in Central Vermont, the technological age has not quite hit our smart phones, which can be frustrating as we go about our day to day business. Cell carrier coverage is spotty in many towns including

numerous dead zones in larger population areas.

CVRPC completed a cellular service drive test analysis in late 2019 and summarized that data in tables and maps for the region. VISTA member Nick Kramer traveled Central Vermont roads and collected speed data for the following carriers: AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon, US Cellular, and VTel Wireless. The Vermont Public Service Department processed this data and calculated the average download speed for a 1 km block area. The data represents how fast the cell phone is able to download data, which is essentially connected to how strong the signal on the phone is, much like the bars you see on your cell phone. Being able to visualize this data will help to advocate and plan for improved cell coverage region-wide.

Find a sample of the map for AT&T average download speed [here](#). This map shows the AT&T average download speed in megabytes (MB) per second for the region. Areas in yellow have faster download speeds and therefore better cell signals. If your community is interested in a map of cell coverage in your town or in working to improve service, contact Pam DeAndrea, Senior GIS Planner at deandrea@cvregion.com.



GIS Technology Aids Flood Resilience

Photo Credit: Vermont Historical Society

Tropical Storm Irene and the May 2011 flood caused widespread damage from flooding, erosion and deposition on roads and stream crossings. Predictions show that the Northeast will experience more frequent storms like these due to climate change. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans)

has developed a tool to help towns prepare for this reality. The tool, called the Vermont Transportation Resilience Planning Tool (**TRPT**), is a web-based application designed to help integrate risk from increased large storm events into the transportation planning process and that helps create a more resilient transportation network.

In 2019 and 2020, CVRPC and VTrans worked with eight towns in the Stevens Branch Watershed to incorporate past flood damage to use the Geographic Information Service (GIS) based TRPT tool. CVRPC determined the vulnerability of road embankments, bridges and culverts to closure and/or failure in the event of a large flood event. Closures and/or failures were categorized as caused by one of three major stream processes: inundation, erosion or deposition. In collaboration with VTrans, the University of Vermont calculated infrastructure criticality in the transportation network. Vulnerability and criticality were combined to determine a risk factor for each road segment, bridge and culvert. Risk factors and risk reduction recommendations are now accessible to the towns via the **TRPT app**. It can be used to prioritize and plan future improvements. In 2021, CVRPC will manage a statewide effort by RPCs to create statewide coverage of the tool so all towns have access and information.

Congratulations Middlesex, Moretown, Warren and Woodbury!

Four towns in Central Vermont were awarded state Municipal Planning Grants (MPG from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in 2020. They successfully competed against 54 municipalities and are 4 of 31 funded across the state. Towns have 18 months to complete their project.

Middlesex Selectboard member Liz Scharf led the local effort to seek funds to develop a Capital Improvement Plan. Middlesex will research, develop, and build community ownership of a 10-year capital improvement plan to guide investments in local public resources. The Town was awarded \$8,912.



The Moretown Planning Commission, led by Jonathan Siegel, Chair, and Karen Horn, Vice Chair, will revise and modernize the local zoning ordinance to include recommendations from the Zoning for Great Neighborhoods Guidebook to concentrate housing development in the village. The Town received \$11,200 toward the project.

The Town of Warren will complete an overhaul of its Land Use and Development Regulations. Upon adoption, the new regulations will be in conformance with and effectively implement the recently modernized Warren Town Plan. Warren received \$4,589 toward the multi-year project.

Thomas J. Lindsay, Woodbury Planning Commission Chair, coordinated efforts to secure funds to support pandemic-era public outreach and engagement as part of the Town's current Town Plan update process. The new plan will have an emphasis on strategic initiatives to address timely and emerging community issues. Woodbury received \$7,495.

"As Vermont continues to grow its economy, maintain a high quality of life and attract new people and business to the state, Municipal Planning Grants help communities accelerate local solutions, energize downtowns, remove barriers to much-needed housing," said Vermont DHCD Commissioner Josh Hanford.

Awarded annually and administered by DHCD, the Municipal Planning Grant program supports local community revitalization and planning initiatives. Since 1998, the program has provided \$13 million to 235 cities and towns across Vermont, bringing people together to adopt useful and relevant municipal plans and implementing those plans through downtown revitalization, updating regulations, improved capital budgeting and innovative projects that to prepare for the challenges they face.

Learn more at:
<http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant> For assistance with shaping a competitive project or writing an application, contact Clare Rock at rock@cvregion.com

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