

Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission FY 16 Annual Report

Founded in 1967, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) assists its 23 member municipalities in providing effective local government and working cooperatively to address regional issues. CVRPC is governed by representatives from the 20 municipalities of Washington County and the three Orange County towns of Orange, Washington, and Williamstown. The legislative body of each municipality selects the community's representative to the Commission.

Municipal Planning and Implementation

RPCs act as a cost effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has been focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and enhanced consultations (on-site training), bylaw modernization, facilitating transition to Development Review Boards and implementing new requirements for economic development and flood resiliency 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 At Work map; highlights include:

- Strengthened compact centers by assisting with new Village Center designations in Marshfield and Waterbury, developing Town Plan language to position for Berlin for New Town Center Designation, and updating Montpelier's Growth Center map.
- Trained municipal boards and staff on HUD's Manufactured Home Rule, The Essentials of Land Use Planning, Managing Stormwater Runoff with Green Infrastructure, the Vermont Clean Water Act, Vermont's online Forest Stewardship Atlas, and comprehensive energy planning.
- Evaluated 13 Town Plans for forest integrity concepts and worked with municipalities to identify and implement tools that protect unfragmented forests.
- Facilitated a public meeting in Marshfield to solicit input on the effectiveness of the Town's zoning regulations in maintaining rural character. The Town intends to complete a natural resources inventory and update its zoning regulations in 2017.
- Completed enhanced consultations in Berlin, Cabot, Marshfield, and Waitsfield.
- Completed Community Rating System (CRS) checklists for five municipalities. CRS is part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Communities that enact qualified floodplain management activities exceeding and enhancing NFIP minimum requirements are rewarded with reduced flood insurance premiums for property owners. CVRPC assisted Waterbury to develop programs and regulations. The Town subsequently applied to enter the program.

Regional Planning

RPC's 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.

The CVRPC adopted the 2016 Central Vermont Regional Plan in July, incorporating changes to the Land Use, Economic Development, and Utilities and Facilities elements.

Concurrently, CVRPC has been working on a full and comprehensive Regional Plan update known as *Plan Central Vermont*. This four-year planning process is bringing together residents, elected leaders, the professional community and community-based organizations in a conversation around how to best address issues and ensure the long-term health and vitality of the Central Vermont Region. The Plan builds on past regional planning efforts in Central Vermont and looks towards the future using the vision created through the public engagement process.

As identified in *Plan Central Vermont*, CVRPC adopted a new approach to addressing housing challenges in the region in FY 2016. CVRPC will work with groups of municipalities experiencing shared housing challenges to foster cooperative approaches for addressing the challenges. Work on finalizing *Plan Central Vermont* will be completed in late 2017.

Adoption of the 2016 Central Vermont Regional Plan will ensure consistency in implementation and evaluation of regionally significant projects. These include applications that are reviewed under Section 248 and Act 250. Specifically, the 2016 Central Vermont Regional Plan recommends actions that should be taken regarding telecommunication facilities (such as colocation) and orienting development to limit impacts on the natural environment. *Plan Central Vermont* will include more detailed implementation that can be more effectively evaluated to measure progress.

Plan Implementation: CVRPC uses the Central Vermont Regional Plan to evaluate applications and participate in Act 250 and Section 248 projects, to evaluate public and private funding applications, and to establish its annual work program direction. In 2016, seven applications were reviewed for Regional Plan conformance. The Committee determined four did not have Significant Regional Impact. Two applications conformed to the Regional Plan, and the Committee provided comments on traffic issues and site configuration, which applicants chose to address.

An application for telecommunications infrastructure was withdrawn based on local and regional input. Coverage maps provided in Section 248 applications often lack sufficient data to determine whether collocation is feasible, such as data on existing coverage and how new service would enhance, rather than duplicate, coverage. CVRPC advocates for co-location, which provides for the best use of limited public funds and the least impact to environmental and transportation resources.

Brownfields

Vermont RPCs have sought and have been awarded over 10 million dollars for this economic development initiative. Environmental site assessments allow properties to be sold, developed or re-developed in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs and increase housing opportunities.

- Served on Northfield's Area Wide Plan Steering Committee. Four downtown properties were targeted for redevelopment based on community vision and market, architectural and environmental assessments.

- Guided a multiagency project for a floodplain buy out and restoration in Woodbury's village center, ensuring multiple funding sources are coordinated and used efficiently. CVRPC's Brownfields Program is providing brownfield assessment funds for the property, a former general store and gas station built over a stream.
- Awarded brownfield assessment technical assistance to three properties in Barre City to implement the City's Master Plan. One site will support a low income housing development through development of a parking and a pocket park. Two sites will be used together to expand an existing business and add to rental apartment stock.

Economic and 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 Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) to this end in a number of ways, including development of comprehensive strategies that will help to position Vermont for long term economic gain.

- Initiated work on a Village Master Plan for East Montpelier to better position the town's core village areas to stimulate economic activity and vibrancy.
- Completed a regional infrastructure needs assessment. Prioritized Plainfield, Barre, Montpelier, Northfield, and East Montpelier for assistance with wastewater and water supply challenges that impede robust development.
- Inventoried and mapped over 1,000 sewer manholes in Barre Town, supporting the Town's effort to strengthen management and maintenance of its infrastructure.
- Partnered with the State of Vermont, Barre City, and Barre Town on the Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative. This effort evaluates where flooding risk intersects with communities' economic activity and infrastructure. The overall goal is to develop implementation strategies that protect business and infrastructure, and help them recover more quickly after disasters.
- Discussed green infrastructure options with Plainfield's Wastewater Committee. The community is facing a significant and costly wastewater treatment plan upgrade.
- Drafted an Urban Forestry Management Plan for Northfield to support its downtown revitalization efforts.
- Managed a Community Development Block Grant for Washington for accessibility modifications to the Calef Memorial Library.

Transportation Planning

Through contract with the VTrans, RPCs coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the improvements to Vermont's transportation system, with local communities represented through regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs). Each regional TAC prioritizes projects, identifies local and regional transportation needs, and provides the platform for public involvement in the planning and development of the state's transportation system. RPCs serve as the point of delivery for the statewide transportation planning process to support local, regional, state and federal transportation network advancement.

- **Objective #1 - Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, Regions and Municipalities**
 - **TAC activity** - Hosted eleven TAC meetings with an average municipal participation of 58%.
 - **TAC Outcomes** -
 - Enhanced a cross-regional approach to transportation infrastructure development.
 - Developed deeper knowledge of flood resilient solutions for existing transportation infrastructure and how they might be applied by municipalities.
 - Fostered inter-municipal learning that supports a regional approach to maintenance and expansion of the transportation system.
 - **Other Outreach** –
 - Hosted a road foreman meeting on Act 64 and the Municipal Roads General Permit.
 - Coordinated Road Safety Audit meetings in Barre Town, East Montpelier, Fayston, Middlesex, and Waterbury.
 - Hosted a Transportation Board Public Forum.
 - Coordinated five High Risk Rural Road evaluations.
 - Coordinated School Zone site visits in Barre City and Barre Town.
 - Hosted three public meetings on VTrans road improvement projects.
 - Held one Public Transit Elderly & Disabled meeting.
 - **Data collection RPCs do for VTrans** –
 - Inventoried bridge and culvert locations in seven communities and loaded data into the VTCulverts online database tool.
 - Conducted 27 traffic counts in Barre City, Barre Town, East Montpelier, Waitsfield, and Woodbury.
 - Conducted 64 park and ride counts.
 - Conducted road erosion inventories in Duxbury, Middlesex, Moretown, and Waitsfield.
 - Conducted a pedestrian count in Northfield.

- **Objective #2 - Conformance with Act 200 and Facilitating Decentralized Decision Making**
 - **Status of Regional Transportation plan** – Regional Transportation Plan was adopted 9/8/2008. The plan has been updated and will be incorporated into *Plan Central Vermont*. Adoption is scheduled for fall 2017.
 - **Participation in Project Development Activities** - 0 project scoping efforts, 2 project 502 hearings, 0 accelerated bridge meetings. CVRPC participated in redesign of VTrans' project development process.
 - **Participation in Act 250 review related to transportation issues** - One application involved transportation issues, which the applicant addressed based on CVRPC's comments.

- **Objective #3 - Providing Transportation Planning Support to Municipalities**
 - **47% of TPI budget (Task # 4 Short Range Transportation Planning) supports municipal planning.**
 - Managed the Vermont On-line Bridge and Culvert Tool for RPCs and towns, and participated in its upgrade.
 - Completed a Flood Resilient Transportation Analysis for the Mad River Valley, and expanded the analysis to include eight additional towns.
 - Trained Warren on the use of VTCulverts, enabling town staff to update the Town's online data.
 - Customize a Road Activity Program for Calais, Cabot, East Montpelier, Middlesex, and Woodbury. Towns use the program to track staff and material resources used by road.

Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Resiliency

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, 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. RPC's also help update floodplain bylaws and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans and assisted as needed in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene and other declared disasters.

- Drafted updates to 10 Local Hazard Mitigation Plans. Developed a GIS analysis tool to assess community vulnerabilities and completed vulnerability field work in nine communities for incorporation into the plans. Towns are increasingly concerned about dam safety.
- Assisted Plainfield to address safety concerns for Marshfield Dam #6, including coordination with Green Mountain Power, two municipalities, and state agencies.
- Assisted 23 towns to update and adopt Local Emergency Operations Plans, which support response to all hazard incidents.
- Identified possible funding sources to address culvert "choke spots" in Calais.
- Staffed Local Emergency Preparedness Committee (LEPC) #5 to improve regional capacity to respond to all hazard incidents. Organized and compiled Tier II data and provided summaries to 23 towns for use in Local Emergency Operations Plans.
- Facilitated updates to local shelter data with the American Red Cross and municipalities to ensure residents can access shelter services during disaster events.
- Completed flood resiliency checklists for 19 municipalities. The Checklists gauge natural disaster preparedness. Results are used to strengthen Municipal Plans, Hazard Mitigation Plans, and other resiliency initiatives.
- Participated on the conference planning committee for the 2016 Resilient Vermont Conference. This conference brought together resiliency experts to discuss ways to make communities more resilient to future hazards.
- Completed LiDAR mapping for sections of Waterbury and surrounding towns to provide detailed elevation data. Managing a subsequent project to identify vulnerable sites based on the updated data.

- Completed a Choke Study investigating the possibility of floodplain reconnections in Waterbury and Duxbury.
- Managed a Community Development Block Grant for Plainfield to study two critical bridges in the village. The study identified how best to reduce the impact of flood damage at, and to, these structures.

Geographic Information System Services

In addition to enhancing the RPC work, RPC's provide municipalities, state agencies and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects.

- Updated parcel maps and data for Worcester; the first comprehensive update since 2000.
- Trained staff in Cabot and Worcester on the QGIS mapping software so they could begin maintaining their digital parcel data.
- Updated zoning maps for Marshfield, East Montpelier, Duxbury, and Montpelier.
- Updated Town Plan maps for Woodbury and Williamstown.
- Updated road maps for Barre Town, East Montpelier and Washington.
- Updated Montpelier's Growth Center map.
- Maintained and updated Town web maps for East Montpelier and Middlesex.
- Represented RPCs on the Enterprise GIS consortium.

Energy Conservation and 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.

- Fostered the concept of a 3-town comprehensive energy plan for the Mad River Valley; Anticipate the effort will move forward when energy planning standards are completed.
- Assisted East Montpelier to evaluate and response to a Section 248 solar project application. The project site is one of the few remaining parcels that can support wastewater systems in the village area. A lack of wastewater disposal sites is a significant challenge to village vitality.
- Completed a Location Affordability Analysis for Central Vermont as an approach to addressing Central Vermont's transportation energy use. Traditional measures of housing affordability ignore the cost of transportation, typically a household's second largest expenditure.
- Participated in VTrans' Commuter Rail Feasibility Study evaluating the potential for future service between St. Albans and Montpelier.
- Discussed commuter data with the Montpelier Energy Committee. The committee is interested in passenger rail service between Montpelier and Barre City.
- Provided guidance to Fayston and Barre Town regarding draft community energy standards language for Town Plans to strengthening the Towns' position in the Certificate of Public Good process.

Watershed Planning and 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.

- Collaborated with the Friends of the Mad River for Ridge-to-River, a 5-town project to reduce stormwater runoff reaching the Mad River.
- Managed two stormwater treatment construction projects for Northfield. Three sites now capture sediment and phosphorus for 16 acres of land in Northfield's village.
- Completed the Middle Winooski River Corridor Plan. The study assessed 31 miles of river and streams for impacts from development, agriculture, and natural processes on waterway and riparian habitat stability and identified projects to address opportunities and challenges.
- Hosted seven municipal outreach workshops on Act 64, the Lake Champlain TMDL, the Municipal Roads General Permit, Developed Lands Permit, and Stormwater Master Planning. 46 individuals from 20 municipalities participated.
- Organized and hosted a joint VTrans/ANR/RPC training on the interim road erosion assessment methodology.
- Completed a regional landslide and mass failure analysis using Stream Geomorphic assessments to determine if sites posed risks to transportation infrastructure, residential properties, or commercial development. Facilitated an unmanned aerial vehicle flight over a site on the Jail Branch in Barre City to analyze the site further. The site was incorporated into the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Fostered the concept of an intermunicipal approach to forest integrity planning with rural communities with municipalities, statewide nonprofits, and the VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation. The concept was incorporated into the State's 2017 Forest Stewardship application.
- Coordinated with local watershed groups to identify and implement six Lake Champlain phosphorus reduction projects using a partnership approach that maximizes each organization's knowledge, skills, and resources.
- Assisted Plainfield to incorporate provisions for protection of river corridors, special flood hazard, and landslide hazard areas into its zoning to protect hazardous areas along streams, limit development in floodplains, and avoid future property loss.

Special Projects

Use this to describe any unique efforts, whether it is your HUD grant, a partnership with your local health department, MS-4 implementation, etc.

- Fostered the concept of an 8-town intermunicipal approach to rural water supply planning that serves to address climate change adaptation, fire protection, and forest integrity partnering with the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts and the VT Rural Fire Protection Program. When fully implemented, the project will analyze development patterns, protection needs, and water supply availability and adequacy, and will design water access sites in participating fire districts. Ultimately, towns and fire districts will install hydrants, potentially improve Insurance Service Office (ISO) ratings for residents and businesses, and support climate change resilience and hazard mitigation planning.

- Awarded an Excellence in Regional Transportation Award from the National Association of Development Organization (NADO) Research Foundation for Vermont Road Erosion Risk Analysis project. The Analysis assists municipalities to address state and federal clean water requirements by identifying and prioritizing road erosion sites. Using risk analysis data, the Town of Woodbury reduced the cost of road maintenance and improved water quality by improving four road erosion sites. The Vermont Road Erosion Risk Analysis methodology was developed by CVRPC in partnership with the Friends of the Winooski River, Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District, VT Agency of Natural Resource Department of Environmental Conservation, and Stone Environmental. CVRPC's regional tool expanded statewide in 2015 when the VT Department of Environmental Conservation used it to create a statewide road erosion risk data set. RPCs and the State are working on a version 2.0 of the analysis to refine it as an inventory tool for the Municipal Roads General Permit.

Administration and Funding

CVRPC carries out its mission by leveraging its town assessments and performance-based state grant with other grants and performance based agreements that support specific project work and program needs common to all municipalities. Virtually all of CVRPC's revenue sources are tied to agreements with scopes of work, guidelines and/or performance measures. Funding received through town assessments is the exception, which makes this funding stream particularly important because it gives us the greatest latitude to respond to local and regional needs. The funds are used as for matching funds required by grantors and enable us to work with our municipalities in areas such as transportation, emergency planning, energy, natural resources, and water quality.

For FY 2016, CVRPC's total revenue of approximately \$758,000 was derived from 37 percent regional program grants, 18 percent municipal project grants, 36 percent state performance contract funding, and 9 percent from town assessments.

CVRPC maintains reserve funds to cover operating shortfalls, for non-federal match required for several agreements, and for long-term and equipment reserves. The Commission maintains a four-year plan for equipment and software upgrades and replacement.

The CVRPC's annual independent audit is completed by Certified Public Accountants. The FY2016 audit will be posted to CVRPC's website upon completion.

Eight highly qualified staff support the Commission and its committees, and execute the Commission's program of work: the Executive Director, Finance and Office Manager, Program Manager, two Senior Planners, two Planners, two Assistant Planners, and a summer transportation field intern. For the third year, the Commission partnered with SerVermont AmeriCorps VISTA to host a volunteer focused on incorporating poverty alleviation into CVRPC's policies and activities. CVRPC celebrated its Grants and Office Manager, Laurie Emery, who retired in 2016 after 26 years of service.

In 2016, CVRPC updated its procurement procedures, contracting documents, and personnel policies, and developed 5-year strategic goals. Board development included refreshers about Open Meeting Law, Roberts Rules of Order, and a training on shared municipal services and Act 89, Intermunicipal Service Agreements.

CVRPC provides administrative, fiscal, and technical assistance to three inter-municipal districts: Wrightsville Beach Recreation District, Mad River Valley Planning District, and the Mad River Resource Alliance. CVRPC also provides administrative support and office space for the Cross Vermont Trail. Supporting these groups promotes municipal cooperation, allows the organization to focus on delivering services, and increases financial efficiency in the region.