

# Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

## FY 20 Annual Report

Founded in 1967, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) leverages the power of people working together to assist its 23 member municipalities in providing effective local government and to work cooperatively to address regional issues. CVRPC is governed by representatives from the 20 municipalities of Washington County and Orange, Washington, and Williamstown in Orange County. Each legislative body selects a 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, 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:

- Assisted East Montpelier and Middlesex to secure Village Center Designations, providing property owners with access to resources and incentives for building investments.
- Hosted 3 municipal trainings on community engagement during COVID-19, Zoning Administrator Best Practices, COVID Conundrums, Statute Updates, and State Permit Review.
- Supported Town Plan updates for Plainfield, Barre Town, Barre City, Northfield, Fayston, and Washington through feedback on draft documents, information on flood resiliency, energy planning, forest integrity, and/or mapping to support forest integrity.
- Provided substantial grant writing assistance to Middlesex and Woodbury and coached Berlin, Montpelier, and Worcester on grant applications. The applications supported local actions ranging from municipal plan development, to New Town Center planning and regional collaboration on trail development and maintenance.
- Evaluated constraints and opportunities for developing a non-motorized trail network linking Cabot's State-designated village center to regional trail networks and recreation amenities.
- Assisted Waterbury to develop National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System trainings and updated its river corridor map.
- Coordinated a committee of forestry and natural resource professionals to guide the creation of a Forest Economy Survey. The results are being used to develop a municipal guide outlining strategies for supporting the wood products industry.

### **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.

In FY20, CVRPC initiated a Regional Plan update, focusing on the Plan's Safe and Affordable Housing element. CVRPC presented data it gathered for the Plan to a Regional Housing Summit Planning Committee, which CVRPC facilitated at the request of the Montpelier Housing Task Force. CVRPC also conducted a survey of Regional Housing Partners to update the Central Vermont Housing Resource Guide. Planning for the Summit has paused due to COVID-19.

CVRPC also focused on plan implementation. A sampling of activities includes:

- Fostering regional activities, such as identifying collaborate overlap for childcare advancement with Let's Grow Kids and the Mayor of Montpelier.
- Engaging the development community in discussions of in-development projects prior to Act 250 application submission. These exchanges offer the development community early insights into CVRPC's project review comments and areas of support.
- Conducting a collaborative transportation planning project with municipalities in the Stevens Branch Watershed. This project collected past transportation infrastructure damage data and used VTrans' GIS-based Transportation Resilience Planning Tool to identify flood vulnerabilities and risks. Municipalities use resulting information to plan upgrades that make roads and structures more resilient.
- Supporting the Friends of Winooski to secure funding to continue *Water Wise Woodlands*. This effort among Cabot, Marshfield, and Plainfield was initiated by CVRPC in 2017. It links forest integrity, private forest stewardship, and watershed resilience. Building flood resilience through a forested upper watershed requires incentives, supportive programs, and fostering informal, neighbor-to-neighbor learning among woodland owners and technical experts.

## **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.

In FY20, CVRPC did not have an active brownfields assessment grant. However, it continued to invest staff resources to work with owners and prospective developers:

- **Granite Works, Montpelier:** Hosted a meeting for parties to discuss Corrective Action planning and remediation.
- **East Calais General Store, Calais:** Consulted with a newly established, volunteer non-profit organization - East Calais Community Trust - on the brownfields assessment process in preparation for property acquisition to ensure continued operation.
- **Union Elementary School, Montpelier:** Attended the playground ribbon cutting, celebrating a successful brownfield redevelopment effort that fosters healthy play for children.
- **Granite Shed, Barre:** Consulted with Barre Area Development Corporation (BADC) regarding assistance to a business that experienced a devastating fire. BADC requested CVRPC organize a resource provider meeting to strengthen the business owner's understanding of post-fire requirements and prospective support available for business recovery.

## **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.

- Facilitated Route 12 wastewater extension prospective funders meeting to identify and coordinate resources among State agencies, the Town of Berlin and City of Montpelier, Green Mountain Transit, Weston Mobile Home Park, and private properties.
- Provided grant writing coaching and application comments for Duxbury's broadband innovation grant application.
- Successfully coordinated with RPCs and RDCs in three other regions to win a US Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to create Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the West-Central Vermont region. CEDS development unlocks federal EDA investments for infrastructure development, job creation, and revolving loan funds.
- Assisted the nascent East Calais Community Trust to navigate the Northern Borders Regional Commission grant application process successfully. The Trust will purchase the East Calais Community Store to ensure its continued operation.
- Completed a mobile cellular service inventory by service carrier for all drivable roads in Central Vermont. Detailed coverage maps will aid municipalities in making informed planning decisions, particularly regarding communications-dependent projects or initiatives.

## **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.

### **Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities**

- Held 10 Transportation Advisory Committee meetings.
- Actively engaged 5 non-municipal TAC members in transportation planning.
- Actively engaged 23 municipalities in transportation planning.
- Coordinated 6 activities with municipalities and VTrans.

### **Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning**

- Maintained a current regional transportation plans (within 8 years).
- Reviewed Act 250 applications; no comments required relating to transportation.
- Reviewed Section 248 applications; no comments required relating to transportation.
- Coordinated 9 activities in support of regional public transit providers.
- Participated in 3 VTrans committees.
- Participated in State Project Prioritization.

### **Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities**

- Assisted 10 municipalities with transportation related grants.
- Invested 32% of transportation budget on municipal technical assistance.
- Conducted 10 municipal transportation inventories.
- Completed 1 municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition study.
- Assisted 1 municipality with the transportation element of its municipal plan.
- Completed 11 road erosion inventories in support of the Municipal Roads General Permit.
- Partnered with the Cabot Trail Committee to develop a Trails Master Plan and Implementation Program.

### **Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans**

- Conducted 43 data collection activities specifically for VTrans (traffic counts, park and ride surveys, pedestrian counts, etc.)

### **Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education**

- Facilitated the Local Action for Transportation Transformation roundtable for local energy committees with VECAN and VCRD to capitalize on interest in transforming Vermont's transportation energy profile. Fostered actions community volunteers could take to change transportation energy use. Created a brochure entitled *Green(er) Transportation: Energy-Lowering Opportunities and Incentives in Central Vermont*.
- Facilitated the Regional Elderly and Disabled Persons Advisory Committee meetings to project transportation use and needs and discuss service and rider engagement strategies; addressed COVID response and planning and surveyed older adults and people with disabilities about transit ridership satisfaction.

### **Highlights**

- Supported COVID-19 safety for individuals experiencing homelessness by identifying transportation resources that could be used to transition homeless shelter residents to hotel facilities and transportation resources the shelter could use during the pandemic. Coordination with Green Mountain Transit was critical to success.
- Supported expansion of The Hitching Post, a volunteer rideshare effort, throughout Central Vermont. Coached its creator about working with municipalities and identified grant sources to develop a "User's Guide to the Hitching Post" and for system expansion activities.
- Supported 20 municipalities with implementation of Best Management Practices for the Municipal Grant in Aid program.

## **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND DISASTER RESILIENCY**

RPCs play key roles in the preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, Department of Public Safety, VTrans, the Agency of Natural Resources, and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs). RPCs provide direct staff to the State Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the LEPCs and coordination among responders, municipal officials, and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPCs also help update floodplain bylaws, river corridor regulations, and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans.

RPCs coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans and assist as needed in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene and other federally and non-federally declared disasters. The RPCs are a source of technical support and information and provide coordination and collaboration for trainings, workshops and seminars, often in conjunction with partners.

- Hosted an Emergency Management Director (EMD) roundtable to foster understanding of resource coordination and promote collaboration and coordination.
- Assisted 23 municipalities with development of Local Emergency Management Plans.
- Assisted 6 towns with Local Hazard Mitigation Plan development or approval, providing substantial assistance to 5 towns. 20 of the region's 23 municipalities (87%) have a FEMA-approved plan.
- Provided administrative assistance and fiscal agent services to LEPC 5.
- Assisted EPA in advertising and hosting a Tier II EPCRA workshop, resulting in 89 registrants.
- Developed a Local Emergency Management Plan sharing agreement to facilitate information sharing among municipalities.
- Represented RPCs on the VT Hazard Mitigation Grant Program application review committee.
- Provided State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) support by contacting towns to ascertain damages and by acting as supplemental staff to the SEOC Situational Awareness Unit.
- Participated in the Twin Cities (Barre-Montpelier) public safety communication funding crosswalk meetings to advise the team on grants and creating a competitive application.
- Supported municipal COVID-19 situational awareness by creating regular digests of local, state, and federal information and resources and a CVRPC COVID-19 webpage.

## **GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM SERVICES**

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

- Produced custom maps for Berlin, East Montpelier, Fayston, Montpelier, and Orange.
- Updated municipal plan maps in Barre Town, Duxbury, Plainfield, Washington, and Worcester and zoning maps in East Montpelier and Montpelier.
- Updated web maps for Middlesex and Orange to facilitate information access by the public.
- Assisted 2 nonprofit partners with custom maps or GIS services (creating a region-wide conservation map and creating an online web map).
- Trained Cabot in QGIS to help it manage GIS parcel data.
- Provided childcare maps for school district utilization.

## **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. RPCs also 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.

- Supported local energy committees implementing events related to Efficiency Vermont's Button-Up campaign, including a regional presentation.

- Finalized draft Enhanced Energy Plans for Middlesex, Moretown, Plainfield, Waitsfield, and Woodbury. Once adopted, the municipalities can obtain substantial deference in the Certificate of Public Good process and define preferred sites.
- Facilitated quarterly Energy Committee Roundtables to provide networking and professional development opportunities.
- Commented on municipal enhanced energy planning drafts for Barre City, Barre Town, and Plainfield to strengthen compliance with the State's energy planning standards.
- Convened local public transit champions, transit agencies, and other stakeholders to plan a weeklong campaign promoting public transit in the region (postponed due to COVID-19).

## **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 design and implement stormwater mitigation projects and implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions.

- Advanced Vermont's effort to reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Champlain via the Winooski River Basin by:
  - Completing stormwater mitigation final designs for three sites in Berlin and one in Plainfield.
  - Initiating final stormwater designs for four sites in Woodbury and two in Calais.
  - Completing stormwater mitigation construction projects in Barre City and Northfield. Both projects substantially decreased sediment and phosphorus loading.
  - Engaging municipalities in public-private partnership work for complying with the new 3-acre stormwater regulation.
- Facilitated monthly Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) meetings to provide an educational forum and a working group for basin planning and other water quality initiatives.
- Developed an online web map to depict stream monitoring locations and water quality results for Friends of the Winooski River. The tool is enhancing public knowledge of water quality in the Winooski watershed.
- Engaged municipalities in the development of the Stevens-Wells-Waits-Ompompanoosuc (Basin 14) Tactical Basin Plan.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

**Food Access Map:** The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission Food Access Map was awarded a 2020 Special Achievement in GIS (SAG). The SAG award is given annually to a limited number of ESRI's GIS clients around the world to recognize outstanding work with Geography Systems Technology (GIS) technology in a field of over 100,000 organizations. The map helped the Hunger Council of Washington County visualize food access in relation to various factors like bus routes, locations of jobs, and types of food available in various stores. The interactive map tool allows the Council to layer these variables in different groupings to help it strategize solutions for increasing access to healthy foods. The map is available at <http://map.ccrpcvt.org/foodretailaccess/>.

**Workforce Development System Change:** CVRPC facilitated a multi-sector initiative among social service organizations, economic development entities, education representatives, and businesses. The team is developing an action plan that transitions Central Vermont's workforce development system into a nimble system that works seamlessly to achieve economic stability and improved quality of life for single moms for the mutual benefit of businesses, communities, and future generations. The team's goal is to have 15% fewer single moms living below the federal poverty level by 2030.

## **ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING**

The FY20 CVRPC budget was approximately \$1.5 million. Revenue sources included state and federal performance contracts, grants, and local assessments. Virtually all of the CVRPC's revenue sources are tied to contracts with scopes of work, guidelines, and/or performance measures. This means CVRPC has limited flexibility in how it chooses to use the vast majority of its funding. Funding received through municipal assessments is the exception, which makes this funding stream particularly important. It gives us the greatest latitude to respond to the region's needs. The grants we receive enable us to work with our towns on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, energy, and natural resources. Revenue from virtually all federal and state grantors requires non-federal matching funds ranging from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant). Municipal assessments and regional planning funds passed through to CVRPC under a performance grant with the Department of Housing and Community Development provide matching funds.

CVRPC maintained its line of credit in 2020 due to a prevalence of product-based and construction contracts. It maintains a Board-designated reserve fund, and a four-year plan for equipment and software upgrades and replacement.

CVRPC's annual audit will be completed in fall 2020. CVRPC has had no audit findings in recent years. It is considered a 'low risk' grantee by federal agencies. Staffing in 2020 included 8 employees: Executive Director, Program Manager, Senior Planners (2), Planners (2), Assistant Planner, and an Office Manager. CVRPC supported workforce development through use of a Planning Technician for transportation and planning services. It hosted an AmeriCorps VISTA member focused on poverty alleviation activities. CVRPC contracts for accounting services.

In 2020, CVRPC adopted Rules of Procedure for its Executive Committee, substantially updated its Bylaws, and updated its Internal Controls and Administrative and Financial Procedures.