

Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

FY 21 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:

- Provided grant writing assistance to three municipalities for successful applications to amend zoning, develop a capital improvement plan, and engage the public in development of a new town plan.
- Assisted Orange with successful Village Center Designation application, providing property owners with access to resources and incentives for building investments.
- Assisted Middlesex and Moretown to amend their zoning regulations, reducing regulatory barriers to housing development in the village, increasing flood resilience, and protecting natural resources.
- Partnered with the Woodbury Planning Commission to develop a new town plan, including engaging its citizens through surveys, presentations, and events.
- Assisted Roxbury and coached Worcester on their Town Plan updates.
- Held a series of Planning & Zoning Forums for municipalities staff and Boards to build knowledge of current and emerging planning issues.
- Approved four municipal plans, issued three enhanced energy plan certifications, and confirmed four municipal planning processes.
- Assisted Middlesex to develop its first capital improvement program, leading to similar requests from Orange and Barre City.
- Assisted Cabot and Waitsfield with development of ash tree management plans. The arrival of Emerald Ash Borer means municipal costs for debris removal will increase substantially.

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 FY21, CVRPC continued efforts on the Regional Plan update, by gathering data across transportation, housing, and economic sectors.

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

- Amended the Regional Plan to update changes in Montpelier's growth center boundary and to eliminate an outdated Housing Distribution Plan.
- Supported Preferred Site Designation for two properties to host new renewable energy generation technologies. The results will further the goals of the regional energy plan.
- Commented on a Waterbury subdivision Act 250 application to further regional forest integrity goals.
- Supported Berlin's successful New Town Center designation, which promotes coordination of housing development and municipal infrastructure in mixed use areas. Outcomes will further regional land use and housing goals.
- Supported the Friends of Winooski 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.
- Convened regional recreation facilities, providers, and businesses to share ideas and identify future collaborations to strengthen the region's recreational economy and opportunities.
- Provided comments on the 2021 VELCO Long Range Transmission Plan.
- Creating an online web map to analyze how municipalities are aligning future land use with regional forest integrity efforts.

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 FY21, CVRPC did not have an active brownfields assessment grant. However, it continued to invest staff resources to work with owners and prospective developers by assisting them to leverage funding from other sources. Interest in brownfield redevelopment remains strong in Central Vermont.

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.

- CVRPC lead data gathering for the West Central Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development (CEDS). The CEDS is a partnership among RPCs and RDCs in Central Vermont, Rutland, Addison, and Chittenden Counties, and the Vermont Department of Economic Development. The effort focuses on pandemic recovery economic development strategies. An adopted CEDS can unlock future federal EDA investments for infrastructure development, job creation, and revolving loan funds.
- Coordinated with municipalities, regional non-profits, and CVEDC to set regional priorities for economic development projects. The projects will be included in the State Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and serve as priority projects for State investments.
- Wrote a USDA grant application for a financial feasibility study for the Plainfield Co-op.
- Provided administrative support to CVFiber, Central Vermont's Communications Union District. CVFiber plans to expand fast, affordable broadband in the region.
- Provided floodplain map and federal grant program information to Capstone Community Action to facilitate planning for an expansion of its childcare facility in Barre.
- Partnered with regional organizations to successfully encourage Census participation. Decennial Census counts affect the distribution of federal and state funding for 10 years.
- Developed a web map to show municipal and regional protections for forested areas and compared them with state data used for Act 171 (forest integrity) compliance. Drafted economic development policy language to assist municipalities to support forest economy businesses.

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 8 non-municipal TAC members in transportation planning.
- Actively engaged 21 municipalities in the Transportation Planning Initiative.
- Coordinated 4 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 4 activities in support of regional public transit providers.

- Participated in 4 VTrans committees.
- Participated in State Project Prioritization.

Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities

- Assisted 5 municipalities with transportation related grants.
- Invested 55% of transportation budget on municipal technical assistance.
- Conducted 6 municipal transportation inventories.
- Completed 1 municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition study.
- Assisted 4 municipality with the transportation element of its municipal plan.
- Completed 8 road erosion inventories in support of the Municipal Roads General Permit.
- Designed a series of community conversations for Plainfield to facilitate decision making on the Route 2/Main Street intersection redesign.
- Assisted Berlin and Plainfield with successful Bicycle and Pedestrian grant applications; reviewed applications for five other municipal projects.
- Provided Municipal Project Management (MPM) services to Middlesex and Waitsfield.
- Assisted Waitsfield with completing the regional priority application for the VTrans Project Selection and Project Prioritization Project (VPSP2).

Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans

- Conducted 20 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 Regional Elderly and Disabled Persons Advisory Committee (REDPAC) meetings to project transportation use and needs and to discuss service and rider engagement strategies; addressed COVID response and planning and surveyed older adults and people with disabilities about transit ridership satisfaction.

Highlights

- Guided the Central Vermont Elders & Persons with Disabilities Committee through drafting its first annual work program.
- Supported 17 municipalities with implementation of Best Management Practices for the Municipal Grants in Aid program.
- Participated in the MyRide Advisory Committee, transitioning fixed route transit services to on-demand, flexible service that better meets rider needs.

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 two Emergency Management Director (EMD) roundtables to foster understanding of the CARES program and share COVID after-action "lessons learned" and best practices.
- Wrote a successful FEMA grant application for a scoping study examining alternatives for a VTrans-owned railroad trestle in Barre City. The trestle traps river debris, causing flooding.
- Assisted 23 municipalities with development of Local Emergency Management Plans.
- Assisted 4 towns with Local Hazard Mitigation Plans. 20 of the region's 23 municipalities (87%) have a FEMA-approved plan.
- Provided administrative assistance and fiscal agent services to Local Emergency Planning Committee 5.
- 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.
- Supported municipal COVID-19 situational awareness by creating regular digests of local, state, and federal information and resources and a CVRPC COVID-19 webpage. Interviewed 23 municipalities to develop lessons learned and best practices for response and recovery.
- Completed a public Wi-Fi hot spot assessment of signal strength, speed, coverage, ease of login, and accessibility and facilitated improvements at three sites. Enhanced broadband accessibility increased access for school children and remote workers and improved the ability of health care institutions to provide medical care access.

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 East Montpelier and Montpelier.
- Updated municipal plan maps for Roxbury, Woodbury, and Worcester and zoning maps for East Montpelier, Montpelier, and Waterbury.
- Updated web maps for Calais and East Montpelier to facilitate public access.
- Created a custom GIS web map for the Northfield Conservation Commission to assist with Town Forest planning.
- Updated GIS parcel data and tax maps for Duxbury and Middlesex to provide updated parcel information to the Listers, landowners, and parcel data users.
- Created emergency road map for East Montpelier for emergency service providers.

- Conducted site walk with the Orange Conservation Commission and developed GIS data collection app to map trails in the Town Forest. The trail mapping will enable the Town to apply for grants for trail construction.

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.
- Coordinated with local organizations and provided educational trainings and roundtables for energy committees and interested residents.
- Reviewed Barre Town and Northfield Municipal Plans and issued Determinations of Energy Compliance for both, providing these municipalities with substantial deference in Section 248 proceedings.
- Assisted Middlesex, Plainfield and Waitsfield in finalizing their Enhanced Energy Plans.

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:
 - Continuing stormwater mitigation final designs for one site in Moretown, four sites in Woodbury, and two sites in Calais.
 - Completing a stormwater mitigation construction project in Berlin that assists the Town with meeting the 3-acre General Stormwater Permit.
 - Engaging municipalities in public-private partnership work for complying with the new 3-acre stormwater regulation.
 - Initiating a stormwater construction project for treatment and gully restoration at The Health Center in Plainfield.
- Facilitated monthly Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) meetings to provide an educational forum and a basin planning work group for municipal officials.
- Developed an online GIS web application to depict stream monitoring locations and water quality results for Friends of the Mad River. The tool is enhancing public knowledge of water quality in the Mad River watershed.
- Engaged Woodbury and the CWAC in the development of the Lamoille Tactical Basin Plan.

- Assisted DEC to craft its Clean Water Service Provider Rule. CVRPC has been designated as the Winooski Basin Clean Water Service Provider by the Agency of Natural Resources.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER): In partnership with the Department of Taxes, CVRPC served as statewide RPC lead for Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER) program assistance to municipalities. RPCs provided region-wide and 1:1 assistance to Units of Local Government, including training, coaching, expense identification, and reimbursement application assistance. Collectively, RPCs provided 1:1 targeted support to 159 units of local government, resulting in 153 eligible applications being submitted and reimbursement of \$7.9 million in COVID-related expenses.

Greater Barre Working Communities Challenge Facilitation:

In Barre City, 55% of single female head of households with children lived below the federal poverty threshold in 2018, a sharp ~10% acceleration from 2016 and 2017. This same population in Washington County, the State of Vermont, and the United States, rose minimally during the same period, ending at 33%, 35%, and 38% respectively. CVRPC facilitated a multi-sector stakeholder team aimed at creating a nimble workforce development system that works seamlessly to achieve economic stability and improved quality of life for single moms for the mutual benefit of our businesses, communities, and future generations. The team used Appreciative Inquiry and a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) strategic planning process to identify what is working well and used it to strengthen organizations and initiatives. The team completed 29 interviews with a single mothers, employers, and representatives from education, social service organizations and service users, and the non-profit sector to inform its plan. CVRPC authored a successful grant application that resulted in an award of \$300,000 to implement the team's workforce system modernization ideas.

Transportation Resiliency Planning Tool (TRPT):

At the request of VTrans, CVRPC served as statewide RPC lead to expand the TRPT statewide. This tool allows municipalities to better plan for infrastructure replacement from a flood resilience lens. RPCs incorporated local damage information and entered vulnerability and road importance data to assist VTrans with development of the TRPT tool. As specific watersheds are completed, RPCs assist municipalities to incorporate TRPT results into municipal plans and local hazard mitigation plans.

ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING

The FY21 CVRPC budget was approximately \$1.13 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 2021 due to a prevalence of product-based contracts and to mitigate the effects of delayed state payments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 2021. CVRPC has had no audit findings in recent years. It is considered a 'low risk' grantee by federal agencies. Staffing in 2021 included 9 employees: Executive Director, Senior Planners (3), Planners (2), Assistant Planner (2), and an Office Manager. CVRPC supported workforce development through use of three Planning Technicians for transportation and planning services. CVRPC contracts for accounting services.

In 2021, CVRPC adopted Rules of Procedure for four Committees, revised its Bylaws, and updated its Internal Controls and Administrative and Financial Procedures to operate in a fully-remote environment.