

Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

FY 22 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:

- **Municipal Plans:** Assisted nine municipalities with municipal plan updates, including assisting Woodbury with a substantial re-write of its plan.
- **Municipal Plan Approvals/Confirmations/Energy Certifications:** Approved three municipal plans, confirmed three municipal planning processes, and issued one Determination of Energy Compliance.
- **Zoning:** Assisted five municipalities with zoning amendments, including assisting Middlesex and Moretown to reduce regulatory barriers to housing development in village areas, increase flood resilience, streamline the permit process, and protect natural resources. Served as Moretown's Interim Zoning Administrator during a staffing gap.
- **State Designations:** Assisted two municipalities with Village Center Designation applications. Supported Berlin to meet award conditions of its New Town Center Designation.
- **Training and Education:** Held three Planning & Zoning Forums to build knowledge of current and emerging planning issues, including the new Cannabis marketplace.
- **Grant Writing and Administration:** Wrote four grant applications to support zoning amendments, a capital improvement plan, a town hall modernization, and a village center revitalization using the recreation economy.
- **Capital Improvement Planning:** Assisted Middlesex to write its first capital improvement program and acted as project manager for Orange's first comprehensive capital planning program. Provided Calais guidance about board responsibilities for capital planning.

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 FY22, CVRPC continued efforts on the Regional Plan update by initiating a 30-year equity change analysis, analyzing how municipalities are aligning future land use with regional forest integrity efforts, and compiling trail, bicycle, and pedestrian data to identify data gaps.

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

- Commented on two prospective cell tower proposals; both proposals did not move forward due to local opposition.
- Provided comments on the 2022 State Comprehensive Energy Plan.
- 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.
- Fostered recreation economy discussions between the business community, non-profit sector, and municipal and regional recreation resource groups to facilitate connectivity among facilities and community centers.
- Launched work on a child care idea guide to advance municipal action.

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 FY22, CVRPC reinvigorated its Brownfield Advisory Committee, provided information about available brownfield grants to three regional development groups, and initiated a brownfield assessment for a property in downtown Barre City. The Turning Point Center of Central Vermont will transform the property into a model recovery center for adults. Turning Point helps people find, maintain, and enhance their substance abuse recovery through peer-based recovery supports, by providing educational programs, and acting as a safe haven for sober recreation and social activities.

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.

- **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:** CVRPC lead data gathering for the [West Central Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (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. It focuses on pandemic recovery economic development strategies. The draft CEDS has been released for comment.

- **Grant Writing and Administration:** Wrote a successful USDA grant application to assist the Plainfield Co-operative with business planning. Coached representatives of The Hub, a proposed recreation facility in Montpelier, on potential grants and how to access them.
- **Broadband Development:** Provided administrative support to CVFiber, Central Vermont's Communications Union District as it builds its fiber broadband system.
- **Childcare Enhancement:** Initiated development of a childcare idea guide to spur municipal action.
- **Healthy Communities:** Chaired the Washington County Hunger Council, which focuses on food related issues. Worked with other RPCs to build a health equity toolkit for municipalities. Initiated a collaborative planning effort with other RPCs and [Project Footprint](#) for mobile solar + storage equipment to support municipal energy resilience for cooling and heating centers, emergency response, and community events. The planning will culminate in a demonstration tour of mobile solar and storage equipment at locations throughout Vermont in 2023.
- **Tourism:** Built consensus among the Green Mountain Byway Steering Committee on how to move forward with mapping the byway via a web map experience.
- **Regional Project Prioritization:** Coordinated with municipalities, regional non-profits, and CVEDC to set regional priorities among economic development projects. The regional project list serves as an investment guide for the State.

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, with 18 municipalities regularly attending. Meetings included regular attendance by GMT and VTRANS. TAC meetings provide an opportunity to gather community expertise and guide regional transportation planning.
- Actively engaged 21 municipalities in the Transportation Planning Initiative. Each municipality had an opportunity to provide input to facilitate the Region's work on statewide priorities.
- Coordinated activities between municipalities and VTrans, including the regional mobility committee, new project summaries, and regional transit coordination.

Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning

- Maintained a current regional transportation plan (within 8 years).
- Reviewed Act 250 applications; no comments required relating to transportation.
- Reviewed Section 248 applications; no comments required relating to transportation.
- Coordinated 3 activities in support of regional public transit providers, including chairing the GMT Board and Leadership Committee, and regular regional mobility committee meetings.
- Participated in 2 VTrans Advisory Committee meetings, including the State Freight Plan Committee and the Knapp Airport Master Plan Advisory Committee.
- Participated in the State transportation capital improvement project prioritization process (VPSP2).

Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities

- Assisted 6 municipalities with transportation related grants, including authoring a successful application for VTrans. The resulting scoping study will examine alternatives for addressing Trestle 308 in Barre City. The Trestle's design causes repeated flooding in neighborhoods.
- Invested 50% of transportation budget on municipal technical assistance.
- Completed 1 municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition study for Northfield. Through extensive public outreach, this consultant led study assessed the feasibility of several alternatives to promote physical activity by improving access to the Town Forest. The study's findings helped the Town win VOREC funding for implementation.
- Provided project management services to Middlesex for a sidewalk planning study.
- Assisted Barre, Plainfield, and Waterbury to complete applications to become regional project priorities for the VTrans Project Selection and Project Prioritization Project (VPSP2).
- Participated in Berlin's Advisory Committee for Fisher Road bicycle and pedestrian planning.
- Continued assisting Waitsfield, the Mad River Valley Planning District, and VTrans to refine a project that will improve the intersection of Route 100 and Route 17.

Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans

- Conducted 19 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 meetings of the Regional Elderly and Disabled Persons Advisory Committee (REDPAC) to discuss service and rider engagement strategies. Surveyed older adults and people with disabilities about transit ridership satisfaction.

Highlights

- Lead the transition the Central Vermont Elders & Persons with Disabilities Committee into a broader Mobility for All Committee focused on meeting the needs of all Vermonters.
- Participated in the Montpelier MyRide Advisory Committee. MyRide transitioned fixed route transit services to on-demand, flexible service that better meets rider needs.

- Convened a meeting among Barre City, Barre Town, Berlin, and Montpelier to discuss ongoing progress developing the Central Vermont Path. The municipalities asked CVRPC to update the regional route map and expand the map's scope to include recreation and other destinations.
- Hosted conversation with regional stakeholders on how to address transit needs to and from the Central Vermont Medical Center, especially during hours when public transit is not available. This meeting created contacts between those needing additional transit resources, transit providers, the State, and mobility funders.

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.

- **Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs) & Implementation:** Assisted Calais and Montpelier to complete LHMPs, and initiated development of LHMPs with Fayston and Orange. 20 of the region's 23 municipalities (87%) have FEMA-approved plans. Held a workshop on the Transportation Resilience Planning Tool (TRPT) and how it can be incorporated into LHMPs. Assisted Woodbury to integrate its LHMP into its Town Plan.
- **Local Emergency Management Plans:** Assisted 23 municipalities with plan development.
- **Training and Education:** Hosted two Emergency Management Director Roundtables. Enhanced access to River Corridor Plans and information on the National Flood Insurance Program, River Corridors, ERAF, etc. via updates to CVRPC's website.
- **Grant Writing and Administration:** Wrote a successful FEMA grant application for to examine alternatives for the Kent Hill Road culvert in Calais. The project addresses repeated flooding.
- **State Support:** 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. Served as the RPC representative to the Department of Health's Hot Weather Planning Workgroup and VEM's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program application review committee. Completed an inventory of EMS, fire service providers, and law enforcement resources in Central VT (Act 166) and consolidated inventories of all RPC for the legislature.
- **Pandemic Support and Response:** Supported municipal COVID-19 situational awareness by creating regular digests of local, state, and federal information and resources and a CVRPC COVID-19 webpage. Coached municipalities on identifying needs and priorities for investment American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and on compliance with ARPA requirements.

- **Other Local Support:** Inventoried ash trees in the highway right of way in Roxbury and assisted the Town with development of a draft ash tree management plan. The arrival of Emerald Ash Borer means municipal costs for debris removal will increase substantially. Assisted Capital Fire Mutual Aid to meet Vermont Open Meeting Law requirements by hosting minutes and documents on CVRPC's website.

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.

- Updated zoning maps for East Montpelier and Waterbury.
- Updated GIS parcel data and tax maps for Middlesex and Duxbury.
- Created Village Designation Maps for Cabot and Berlin.
- Produced custom maps for Fayston.
- Updated web maps for Calais and East Montpelier to facilitate public access to information.
- Created a [Floodplain & River Corridor Management Dashboard](#) for the region. This dashboard conveys the number of buildings in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) and River Corridor. Municipalities use the dashboard to view structures in hazard areas for emergency management planning.
- Completed 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.

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.

- **Enhanced Energy Plans & Certifications:** Assisted Middlesex and Waitsfield to finalize their Plans. Issued Determinations of Energy Compliance for Woodbury's Plan, providing the municipality with substantial deference in Section 248 proceedings.
- **Energy Committee Support:** Supported 14 municipal energy committees and coordinators with energy implementation activities. Provided Barre Town, East Montpelier, and Warren with guidance and resources on developing municipal energy committees. Initiated regional [Window Dressers](#) program. Window Dressers uses community volunteer teams to build affordable, insulating window inserts.
- **Training & Education:** Increased energy communications with municipalities via a monthly Energy e-Digest. The e-Digest has a 77% open rate. Hosted a regional Energy Roundtable that enabled best practice sharing, networking, and collaboration. Establishment of regional work groups to focus on shared priorities as a result of the Roundtable.

- **Data and Standards:** Collaborated with other RPCs, State agencies, and Efficiency Vermont on updates to energy planning standards (Act 174) and the LEAP regionalization analysis and Generation Scenarios tool for best practices for municipal assistance.

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.

- **Basin Plans & Engagement:** Facilitated monthly Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) meetings to provide an educational forum and a basin planning work group for municipal officials. Reviewed the Lamoille Tactical Basin Plan for conformance with the Regional Plan and hosted a satellite public meeting about the Plan for DEC.
- **Basin Plan Implementation:** Advanced Vermont's effort to reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Champlain via the Winooski River Basin by:
 - Completing stormwater mitigation final designs for three properties.
 - Implementing stormwater best management practices at one property and kicking off a second construction project. Addressing a highly eroded gully behind The Health Center in Plainfield will address runoff from adjacent lands and Route 2.
 - Writing successful grant applications for a final stormwater design at the Barre City Auditorium and for construction of a stormwater project at the Moretown Town Office and Elementary School complex.
- **Clean Water Service Provider (CWSP):** CVRPC has been designated as the Winooski Basin Clean Water Service Provider by the Agency of Natural Resources. Developed a web presence to advertise and promote CWSP activities and opportunities. Launched the Winooski Basin Water Quality Council. Assisted DEC to craft its Clean Water Service Provider guidance.
- **Municipal Roads Grants in Aid:** Conducted pre-construction site visits for projects 11 municipalities and coached municipalities on program requirements.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Forest Integrity: FY22 marked the culmination of a multiyear initiative by CVRPC and partners to support protection of forest blocks and habitat connectors and the forest products economy. Statewide, CVRPC worked with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Vermont Natural Resources Council, the Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative, and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to build planning tools. It led a partnership of five other RPC's to assist 38 municipalities incorporate forest integrity planning into their municipal plans. Plans included specific policies to encourage active management of forest areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the municipality. CVRPC hosted trainings for municipalities about Act 171 requirements and worked with partners to draft an idea guide for how municipalities can support the forest economy. In FY22, the partnership created a video series to highlight tools and resources developed by the partnership for municipalities and

regional planning commissions. The *This Forest Matters* video series can be viewed at https://anr.vermont.gov/act171_forestplanning.

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 (LHMPs). CVRPC hosted and presented at workshop on the TRPT and how it can be incorporated into LHMPs.

ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING

The FY22 CVRPC budget was ~\$1 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 2022 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 2022. CVRPC has had no audit findings in recent years. It is considered a 'low risk' grantee by federal agencies. Staffing in 2022 included 9 employees: Executive Director, Senior Planners (3), Planners (3), Assistant Planner (1), and an Office Manager. CVRPC supported workforce development through use of two Planning Technicians for transportation and planning services and one AmeriCorps VISTA member. CVRPC contracts for accounting services.

In 2022, CVRPC continued work to update its Bylaws and modified its Investment and Deposit Risk Policy and Administrative and Financial Management Policies and Procedures. The policy updates keep CVRPC current with State and Federal regulations and help achieve administrative efficiency.