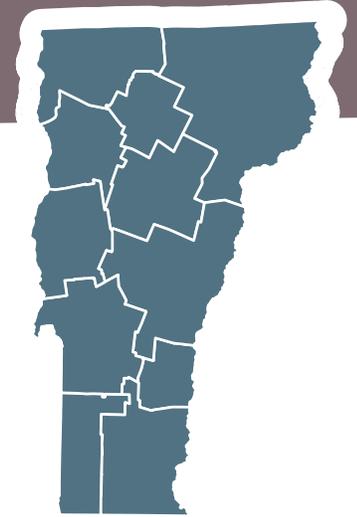


# VAPDA

VERMONT ASSOCIATION OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

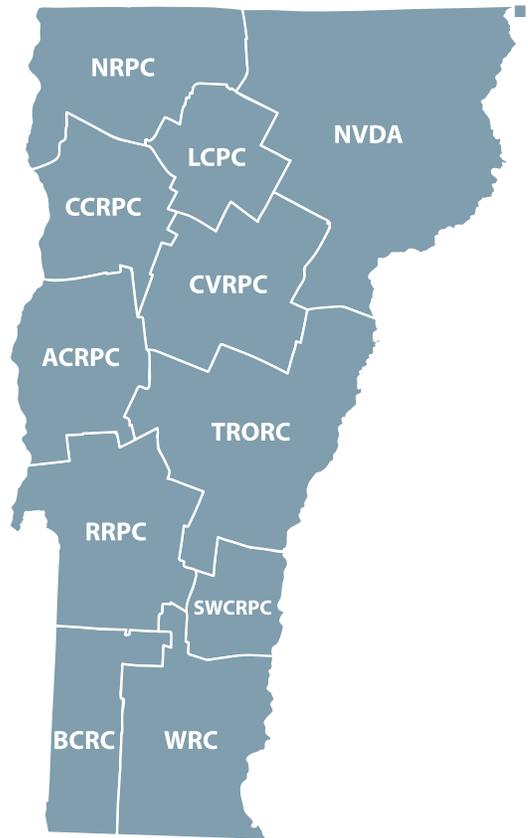
### FISCAL YEAR 2015

ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
BENNINGTON COUNTY REGIONAL COMMISSION  
CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
LAMOILLE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION  
NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION  
SOUTHERN WINDSOR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Regional Planning Commissions	3
Regional Planning	4
Municipal Planning and Implementation	5
Economic and Community Development	6
Transportation Planning	7
Energy Planning, Development, and Conservation	9
Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Resiliency	10
Brownfields	11
GIS Services	12
Natural Resources	12
Watershed Planning and Project Development	13
Community Health	14

- ACRPC** | ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
- BCRC** | BENNINGTON COUNTY REGIONAL COMMISSION
- CVRPC** | CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
- CCRPC** | CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
- LCPC** | LAMOILLE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
- RRPC** | RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
- NVDA** | NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION
- NRPC** | NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
- TRORC** | TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION
- SWCRPC** | SO. WINDSOR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
- WRC** | WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION



## REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS

The *Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies* consists of Vermont’s eleven Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs). RPCs are political subdivisions of the State of Vermont and are uniquely structured and situated to provide a variety of services to their regions and fill a role in the absence of county government.

- RPCs are governed by Boards made up primarily of locally appointed officials.
- RPC ties to local government allow them to serve as a bridge between local, state, and federal governments.
- RPCs have federal and state statutory responsibilities in transportation, land use, emergency management, environmental protection, brownfields, energy, and community and economic development.
- RPCs maximize the recovery of federal dollars for our economy, our environment, and our communities. In FY 2015, RPCs used local and state dollars to leverage **over \$7 million** in additional funds to support community projects.



*Bob Buermann, Chair of Northwest Regional Planning Commission Board, was given both the Vermont and the Northern New England awards for citizen planner of the year for his leadership of the regional commission and his local volunteer efforts.*

## REGIONAL PLANNING

RPCs coordinate planning at the regional level through the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive regional plan and related projects. These plans guide local planning and the investment decisions of the public and private sectors.

All RPCs have updated their regional plans in response to an evaluation sponsored by VAPDA. RPCs examined plans for consistency with statutory requirements and effectiveness in achieving goals.

### **Northeastern Vermont Development Association**

spearheaded an update to the Collaborative Strategic Plan for the region's USDA Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone, a designation that has already directed millions of dollars in USDA Rural Development investments over its 15 years of existence. NVDA maintains the benchmark and reporting system for the Collaborative.

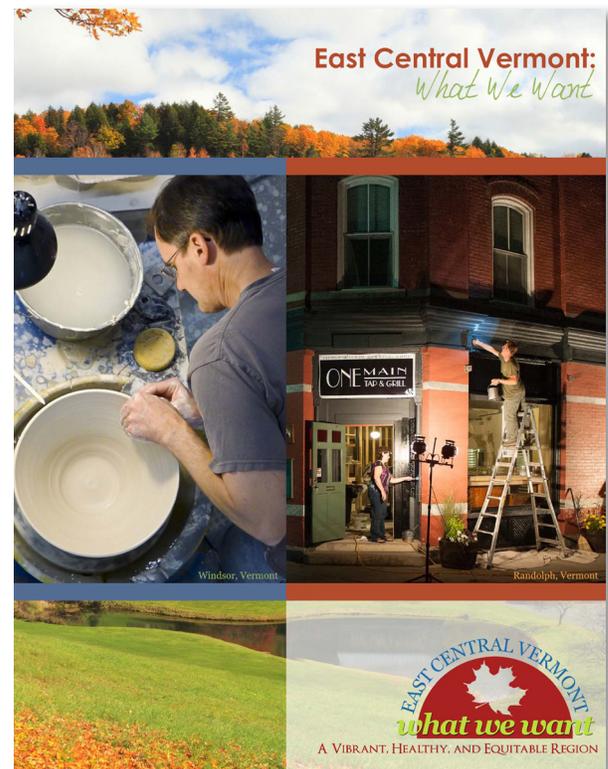
### **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission**

continued its work to create [Plan Central Vermont: Shaping Our Region from the Ground Up](#). The planning project 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 toward the future using the vision created through the public engagement process.

**Lamoille County Planning Commission** completed a solid waste facility siting analysis for Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District in preparation for implementation of Act 148, the Universal Recycling Law.

All RPCs continue to participate in Act 250 and Section 248 regulatory processes to further the goals of the regional plans. RPCs commented on 77 Act 250 major applications statewide, providing guidance to District Commissions for conformance with the regional plan.

## PLAN OF THE YEAR!



**Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission** and **Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission** partnered on an award winning project to develop a vision for how to make Orange and Windsor Counties better places to live, work and play.

The project—[East Central Vermont: What We Want Sustainability Plan](#)—was awarded *Plan of the Year* by Vermont Planners Association. It also received the National Association of Development Organization's 2015 Innovation Award.

## MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

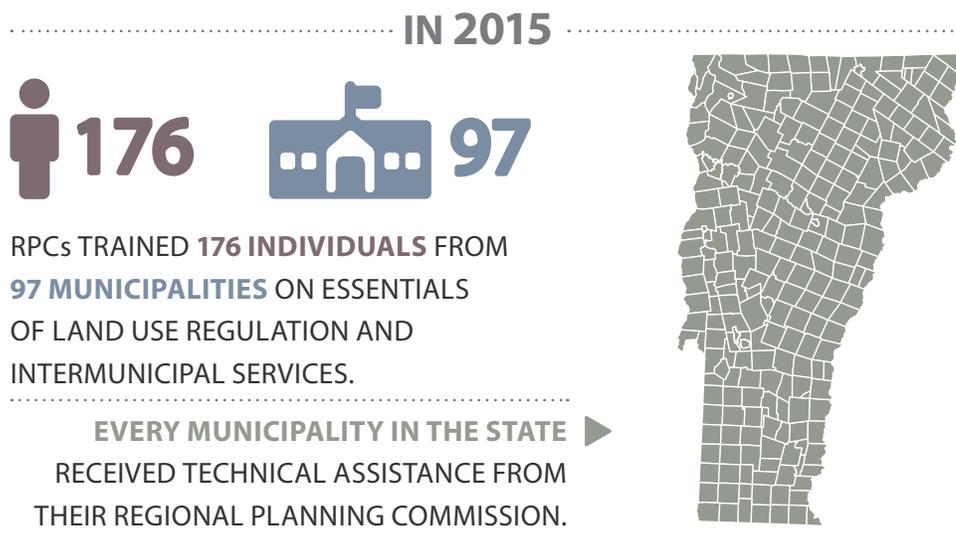
RPCs act as a cost effective professional planning staff for many of Vermont's municipalities. Work in recent years has focused on improving town plans and local permitting through education and on-site training, bylaw modernization, and implementing new requirements for flood resiliency planning. Current and clear plans and bylaws are essential in smooth state and local permitting. Local and regional planning funds, local contributions, and other grants all support this land use work.

Regional Planning Commissions provide technical assistance to municipal planning commissions, zoning administrators, and other local officials. Inquiries can include topics such as public process, Act 250, zoning, subdivision, permitting, and funding. This assistance provides communities with accurate information so that they may conduct their business legally and effectively.

All RPCs conducted training on inter-municipal services and provided follow up assistance. For example, **Bennington County Regional Commission** helped coordinate two major inter-municipal projects in the past year: a study of the potential for shared public safety services for Northshire communities and formation of a new 13-town solid waste alliance operating with a single board and a unified plan. Providing and discussing information on various forms of inter-municipal relationships was an important part of both of these projects. Shared services and alliances assist municipalities in providing effective local government.

**Rutland Regional Planning Commission** created model municipal plan language for solar generation siting and provided municipalities with checklists for evaluating solar and wind generation projects.

**Northeastern Vermont Development Association** assisted Concord with its Town Plan Update, which included a community-wide survey, the addition of a new Flood Resilience section, and the identification of the Village Center designation program as an economic development tool the Town will seek to implement. The Town Plan was adopted in July.



## ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth flourishes when development efforts are partnered with strong planning. RPCs work with municipalities and in partnership with *Regional Development Corporations* (RDCs) to develop comprehensive strategies to position each region of Vermont for long term economic success.

**Addison County Regional Planning Commission** helped the Town of Bristol with its plans to develop property it owns at Stoney Hill as a business and commercial park. The property is within its village planning area, immediately adjacent to its downtown. ACRPC wrote a successful VCDP grant which will enable Bristol to complete a development plan.

With funding from a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG), **Rutland Regional Planning Commission** hosted a two day conference on agritourism. *Welcoming Customers on Your Farm* was held at a variety of venues around the Rutland Region, including three farms. The conference attracted 100 participants. The grant also help fund the creation of 13 Best Management Practices and How-To guides on agritourism.

**Northwest Regional Planning Commission** funded "Business Matters in the Islands" featuring two semesters of workforce classes (in spring and fall 2014), a monthly breakfast meeting (monthly from 2014 through May 2015), and an Islands Summit in February 2015 that attracted 55 people who discussed what initiatives are important to Islanders. Lake Champlain Islands Economic Development Corporation was an organizing partner.

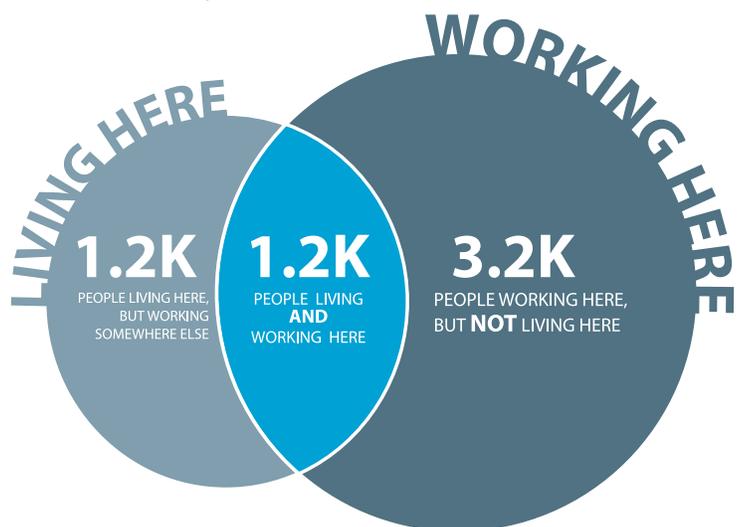
**Bennington County Regional Commission** continues to work with municipalities and partner organizations on a variety of projects related to economic development. In 2015, this included:

- Redevelopment plans and market research associated with a large block of vacant and underutilized commercial space in the center of downtown Bennington.
- Creation and branding of the region's first co-working space ([the Lightning Jar](#)).
- Development of a small grant program to support innovative ideas that benefit people in need ([the Bennington Idea Fund](#)).
- Planning for a regional internship program in collaboration with community partners.
- Conceptual planning for mixed-use development related to key sites in the downtown area.
- Project Management for the Northshire Economic Development Strategy in northern Bennington County (referred to as the "Northshire").

### NORTHSHIRE WORKFORCE

*Employment Inflow/Outflow  
(2013 Data: US Census Bureau; LEHD Survey)*

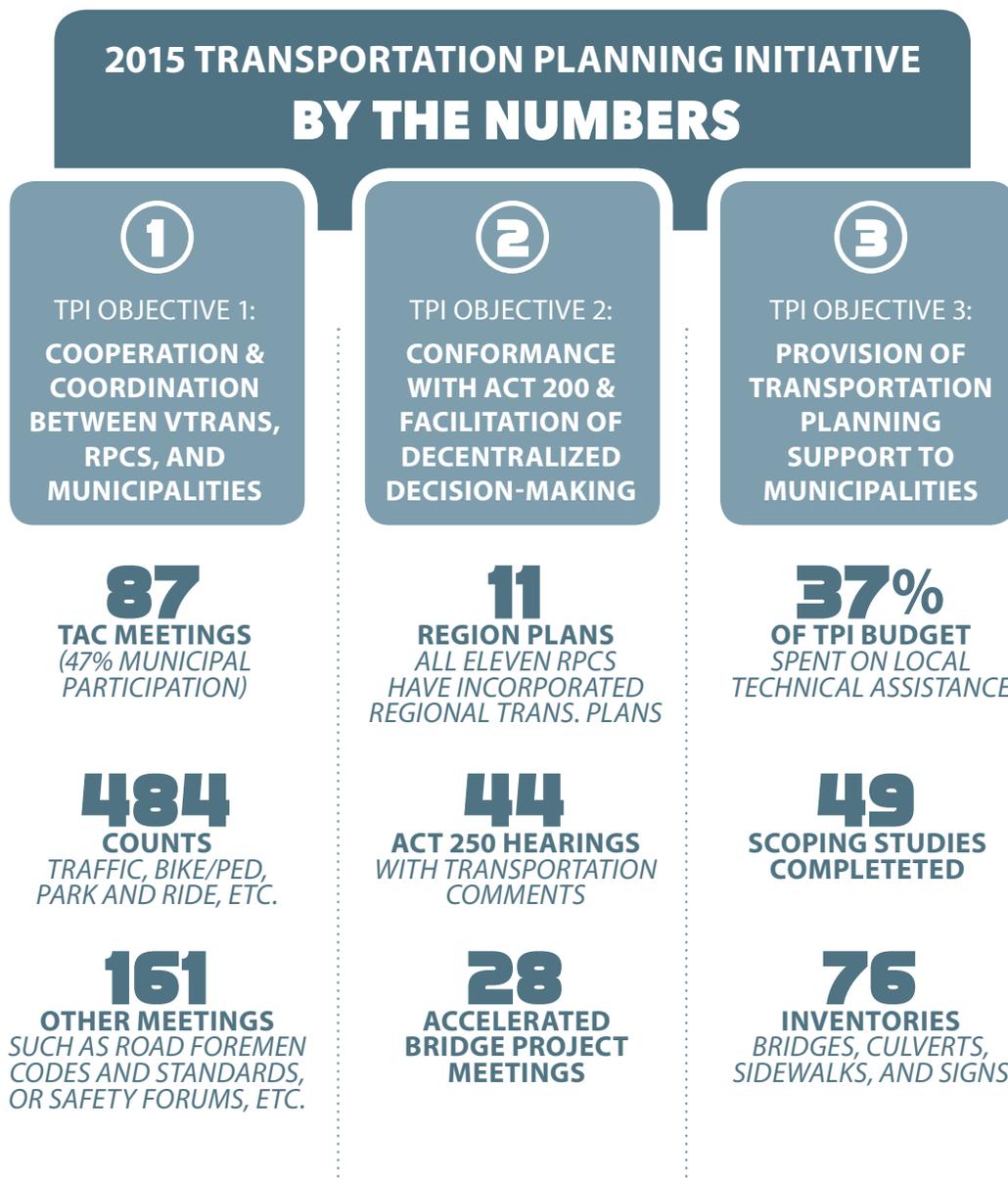
*The graphic to the right, which comes from the Northshire Economic Development Strategy, shows the difference between employed people **living** and **working** in the Northshire as a Venn Diagram. The goal of the project is to "create a vibrant environment that encourages people to both **live and work** in the area."*



## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Through contracts with VTrans, RPCs coordinate the **Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI)**, providing a statewide framework for public involvement in planning the improvements to Vermont's transportation system. Local communities are represented in the process 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.

The TPI program has three main objectives, each covering a variety of projects. The graphic below lists a few highlights of the work that was accomplished through the 2015 TPI program.



In addition to the TPI work listed on the previous page, in 2015, RPCs worked with ANR and VTrans to create an easily accessible online tool for municipalities to manage culvert inventories ([www.vtculverts.org](http://www.vtculverts.org)). RPCs also assisted VTrans with public outreach for construction projects and collaborated on regional Highway Safety seminars attended by hundreds of individuals.

**Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission** and the Town of Berlin completed a US 302 Bicycle & Pedestrian Study to identify an alternative route for the Central Vermont Regional Path. One option presented in the study was reducing US 302 from 5 to 3 lanes to make room for bicycle lanes, a transportation planning technique called a “Road Diet.” VTrans will implement a two-month trial of the proposed lane configuration in a spring 2016 paving project.

The **Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission** also serves Chittenden County as the sole metropolitan planning organization (MPO) operating within Vermont. Congress established MPOs in urban areas to ensure that federal funding for transportation projects and programs are channeled through a planning process. CCRPC receives resources to provide advanced transportation planning and engineering to the region. For example, CCRPC assisted Burlington and South Burlington with an Adaptive Signal Control Project to evaluate a state-of-the-art signal system to reduce traffic congestion in the Main Street/US 2/Dorset Street corridors.



*Northwest Regional Planning Commission provides funding for a part-time staff person to coordinate activities, organize promotional events, and develop and manage a digital app for the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail, a 26-mile multi-use path from St. Albans to Richford.*



*RPCs host regular educational meetings for road commissioners and other transportation professionals, such as this meeting in Rutland County.*

## ENERGY PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND CONSERVATION

A renewed focus on clean, renewable, sustainable, and affordable energy presents Vermont with great opportunities 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. In 2015 RPCs participated in 51 applications statewide, providing local and regional input into the permitting process.

RPCs are coordinating outreach on building energy standards and local permitting requirements and are working with Efficiency Vermont to follow up with municipalities that had done some type of energy audit.

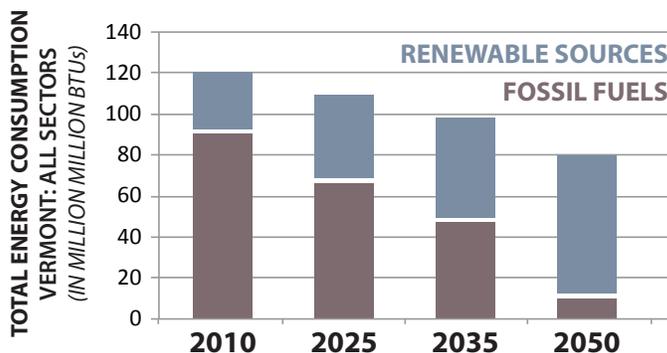
**Addison County Regional Planning Commission** worked with its energy committee to update the RPC's Solar Siting Guidelines and drafted a model solar screening ordinance for Addison County towns as permitted by Act 56.

The **Windham Regional Commission** partnered with local and regional organizations to create the Windham Wood Heat Initiative, a program designed to assist public schools and municipalities in Windham County transition their buildings to wood heat. By the close of FY 2015, the WRC was working with 12 public schools and 6 municipalities (on 12 town-owned buildings) to assess the feasibility of installing wood boilers in their buildings as well as providing assistance to two schools that have wood boilers installed. This \$1.6 million project is funded through the Clean Energy Development Fund (CEDF), which was made possible through the state's settlement agreement with Entergy Vermont Yankee.

---

### REGIONAL ENERGY PLANNING

In 2015, three RPCs—**Bennington County Regional Commission**, **Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission**, and **Northwest Regional Planning Commission** began working with the Public Service Department (PSD), Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC), and other state agencies and organizations, to develop comprehensive regional energy plans. The project relies on specific data analysis and energy systems modeling to generate regional energy generation and conservation targets that align with the state's energy goals—chiefly, the goal of 90% renewable energy for all sectors by 2050. The RPCs will develop regionally-specific strategies related to: electricity generation and efficiency, thermal energy, and transportation. These first three regional energy plans (BCRC, TROC, and NRPC) are due to be published in mid 2016 and will serve as pilots for future regional energy plans to be created by the other eight RPCs.



*Projections like these help citizens and planners understand what is needed to accomplish Vermont's energy goals—chiefly, to generate **90% of all energy from renewable sources by 2050**. Vermonters in all regions will have to change the way they use energy and the total amount of energy used in the state will need to be reduced significantly.*

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND DISASTER RESILIENCY

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with the Vermont Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), VTrans, and the Agency of Natural Resources. RPCs serve in the State Emergency Operations Center, coordinate the Local Emergency Planning Committees, and work with responders and planners throughout the State's four Public Safety Districts. RPCs also help update floodplain bylaws and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans, and assist in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene and other declared disasters.

Each RPC has at least three individuals trained to staff the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC). All RPCs participated in at least one activation of the SEOC, and all participated in VT Yankee drills and the statewide Catastrophic Exercise. RPCs have representation on the State Emergency Response Committee and statewide Hazard Mitigation Committee. In 2014 the RPCs and DEMHS established a new Local Liaison role for RPCs. RPCs assist the SEOC with situational awareness and municipal damage reporting and follow established protocols to ensure statewide consistency during events.

RPCs assist municipalities in their efforts to comply with the requirements of the Emergency Relief Assistance Fund Rule (ERAF) to be eligible for a reduced local match in the event of a declared disaster.

RPCs assist municipalities in completion of Local Emergency Operations Plans, the main emergency plans that municipalities annually update. These plans have critical contact information and data on shelters, vulnerable areas, and emergency operations centers.

**Windham Regional Commission**, with support from its LEPC and the Northeast Regional Director of the Humane Society of the United States, created a template for local officials to use statewide in planning for animals during emergencies. This template and associated guidance document have been adopted by VT DEMHS and integrated into the Local Emergency Operations Plans.



RPCs support Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs); this LEPC meeting was organized by **Rutland Regional Planning Commission**.



**Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission** administered post disaster community development funds (CDBG-DR) for the site shown above—formerly Blackies Riverbend Deli and Convenience Store. Over 100 buyouts have been completed under this grant.

## BROWNFIELDS

Vermont RPCs have sought and have been awarded over 11 million dollars from the US Environmental Protection Agency for this statewide economic development initiative. Three RPCs manage revolving loan funds that provide loans and grants for site clean up. Environmental site assessments allow properties to be sold, developed, or redeveloped in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs, and increase housing opportunities. RPCs work to maximize brownfield funding available to Vermont and within the state by sharing and leveraging EPA funds across regional boundaries.

One example of RPC-led brownfields work is the former Jones and Lamson Machine Co. factory in Springfield—one of the most contaminated brownfield sites in the state—on which **Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission** has continued to work on assessment and remediation. The J&L site was recently approved for entry into the VT DEC's Brownfields Economic Revitalization Alliance program which seeks to put brownfield sites back into economic productivity by receiving priority funding and support.

Algiers Village Housing—a 17-unit affordable housing development in Guilford—received an award for outstanding achievement in the redevelopment of a brownfield site in New England from the *Phoenix Awards Institute, Inc.* The award was presented at the EPA's major national brownfields conference on environmental revitalization and economic development in Chicago. **Windham Regional Commission** was a partner in this project.



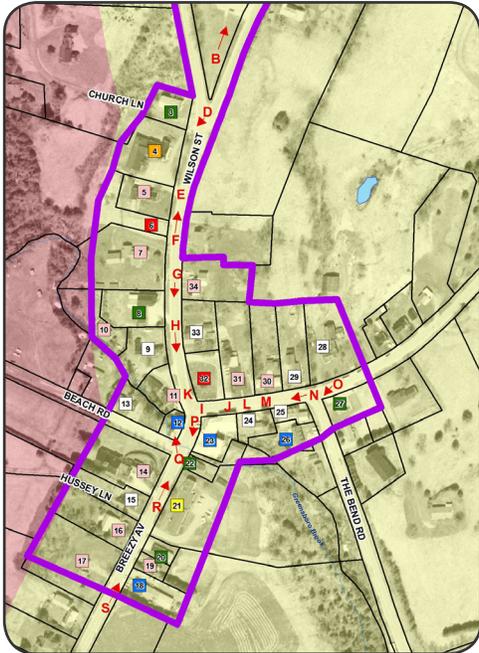
*"Vermont Tissue" property – Bennington, Walloomsac River. BCRC provided over \$100,000 in assessment and clean up funds. Following completion of extensive site assessments and remediation work, the site is now generating hydroelectric energy. The balance of the former mill building is being occupied by a new craft distillery.*



*Susan McMahon of Windham Regional Commission received an award on behalf of Algiers Village Housing for outstanding achievement from the Phoenix Awards Institute, Inc. at the EPA's national brownfields conference in Chicago on September 3, 2015.*

## GIS SERVICES

RPCs use Geographic Information System (GIS) technologies to create maps and analyses for regional planning and implementation. In addition, RPCs provide GIS mapping and data services to municipalities, state agencies, and regional groups in support of their projects.



*GIS map of Greensboro's designated village created by NVDA.*

RPCs utilize GIS to assist towns with road erosion inventories.

**Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission** assessed and prioritized erosion sites along class 3 and 4 gravel roads in three towns. 65% of Central Vermont municipalities have completed erosion assessments. CVRPC created the original road erosion inventory process still used by RPCs, VT ANR, and VTrans today.

As part of an infrastructure needs assessment for the Town of Hyde Park, **Lamoille County Planning Commission** developed a geodatabase of water and wastewater infrastructure by “georeferencing” scanned paper maps in GIS, interviewing town staff, and verifying features in the field.

RPCs also regularly help communities meet the mapping requirements of Downtown and Village Center Designation. For example, **Northeastern Vermont Development Association** completed maps for successful applications for Village Center designation in Greensboro Village and Greensboro Bend.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The backbone of Vermont's heritage and economy is the working landscape, and 75% of Vermont's land is forested. **Lamoille County Planning Commission** serves as RPC-lead for a three-year forest stewardship initiative with the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation aimed at supporting forest conservation and working lands enterprises that maintain healthy forests and resilient watersheds. The initiative includes development of a web-based mapping system for forest stewardship data that supports citizens and municipalities with land management and plan updates.

Collectively, RPCs worked with towns to modernize zoning bylaws and update municipal plan language to provide for conservation innovation and to recognize changing industry needs and the value of backyard milling, maple syrup production, and firewood harvesting to Vermont's economy.



*Morse Farm in Montpelier during maple sugaring season—RPCs help municipalities maintain forest integrity and support forest enterprises. Photo credit: Collin O'Neal.*



## COMMUNITY HEALTH

RPCs are working with health-based stakeholders to increase awareness among decision makers about how cross-sector work can improve the health of communities.

**Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission** and the University of Vermont obtained grant funding to build a Community Health and Public Safety Dashboard that characterizes behavioral health issues by compiling data from a variety of social service agencies, the UVM Medical Center, and the police department. The Burlington Police Department Service Executives Committee guides this work.

Working with the Lamoille Valley Partnership for Success, **Lamoille County Planning Commission** developed a “Primer on Planning for Prevention” aimed at increasing state, regional, and community capacity to prevent underage drinking and prescription drug use. The Primer is a tool to provide sample alcohol policy and bylaw language for municipalities. Its development opened community discussions about municipal roles in alcohol prevention, specifically, the role that regional planning, municipal planning, and regulation can have on alcohol use and fostering healthy lifestyles.



*Senior Planner Melanie Needle was announced the winner of the **Burlington Partnership for a Healthy Community Roots of Prevention Award**. This annual award acknowledges an individual who has positively impacted Burlington by providing prevention opportunities and supporting health and wellness in the community. Melanie accepted the award at a ceremony on October 21, 2015.*