

House Commerce and Economic Development
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James Sullivan, Director, Bennington County Regional Commission

Regional Planning Commissions – Statutory Responsibilities

- I. Economic Development
 - A. Required
 - Economic development programs to support appropriate development.
 - Plans and guidelines to support provision of affordable housing.
 - B. Optional
 - Studies and plans related to economic and social development.
 - Economic development programs.
 - Evaluate economic development conditions and prepare for economic growth.
 - Gather economic and demographic information.
 - Assist existing business and industry, encourage development and growth of small business, and attract industry and commerce.

- II. Regional Plan / Planning
 - A. Required
 - Prepare a regional plan.
 - Review proposed state capital expenditures in the context of the regional plan.
 - B. Optional
 - Inventory public facilities and evaluate sites for distributed power facilities to support emergency response.
 - Special studies and plans related to:
 - **Land development and revitalization**
 - **Transportation**
 - **Economic and social development (noted above)**
 - **Aesthetics/design**
 - **Historic and scenic preservation**
 - **Energy conservation and renewable energy development**
 - **State capital plans**
 - **Wetland protection**
 - Comprehensive planning and engineering studies.

- III. Municipal Planning and Implementation
 - A. Required
 - Advise municipalities with respect to public financing.
 - Assist municipalities with plans, bylaws, and other studies and implementation activities.

- Prepare “implementation guidelines” – directed toward attainment of state planning goals.
- “Confirm” municipal planning processes.
- Help to address cumulative impacts of growth and development.
- Assist in the review of state capital expenditures in the context of municipal plans.

IV. Coordination

A. Required

- Coordinate planning with neighboring municipalities, regions, and states.
- Review and comment on compatibility of municipal plans.
- Help resolve conflicts between regions and between municipalities in different regions.
- Consider “substantial regional impact” when coordinating with municipalities regarding regional impacts of plans and projects.

V. Participation in Regulatory Proceedings

A. Required

- Act 250.
- Section 248.
- Define “substantial regional impact” for use in state regulatory proceedings.

VI. Capacity and Support Functions

A. Required

- Hold public hearings.

B. Optional

- Obtain information from the state and municipalities to support its work.
- Examine/survey land to support its work.
- Retain staff and consultant assistance.
- Acquire and dispose of property, borrow money, act as an escrow agent, and enter into contracts.
- Permit such other functions needed to carry out the intent of the Chapter.

RPCs – Evolving Roles

Most Vermont RPCs are about 50 years old. BCRC – original role was to develop a regional plan and to help all member towns develop municipal plans and land use regulations. Creation was in many ways a response to unplanned development, especially in some of the mountain towns.

Various roles and responsibilities have been added over time; in recent years, transportation planning, emergency management/planning, environmental work (e.g., water quality, forest resource planning, brownfields,...), community and economic development, energy planning, geographic analysis, and an array of special programs that differ somewhat by region. Each region is unique, responding to the needs and requests of its member municipalities, but all RPCs carry out certain core functions, many under single contracts or grants.

By way of example, current BCRC programs include:

- Regional Planning
- Municipal Planning
- Transportation Planning
- Environmental Planning
- Community and Economic Development
- Emergency Management
- Energy Planning
- Solid Waste Management

A note on funding:

- About a quarter of BCRC's funding derives from the Municipal and Regional Planning Fund (associated with the performance contracts overseen by DHCD).
- About 6 percent from municipal appropriations.
- Balance is through a diverse mix of local, state, and federal programs and grants. Some are recurring (e.g., Transportation, Emergency Management,...), although all require annual applications and reporting. BCRC generally involved with 30-40 separately funded activities at any one time.
- Some funding is from contracts for services with member municipalities (often municipal planning grants) or with multiple municipalities (working through an intermunicipal agreement, such as the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance).
- The Bennington County Industrial Corporation (RDC) also contracts with BCRC to provide economic development services. This work is supplemented through special project funding and other sources of revenue.

Example of how pieces can fit together: Meeting later today with two small manufacturers in Sunderland – one produces ice cream and the other specialty chips, salsa, and related items. BCRC has long been involved in planning for agriculture/working lands, more recently with local food systems - and through this network and connections with local officials helped one of the businesses find a location for manufacturing, storage, and a distribution center – next to the other specialty food producer. Work on a food systems plan led to an awareness of a need for additional commercial kitchen space, refrigerated storage, and distribution networks for other small producers. Now working to connect those interests so that the existing facilities are used to capacity and small businesses can share otherwise prohibitive storage and distribution costs. <<Continuum of effort from natural resource conservation to food system planning to small business development/potential food hub>>