

VAPDA

Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2014

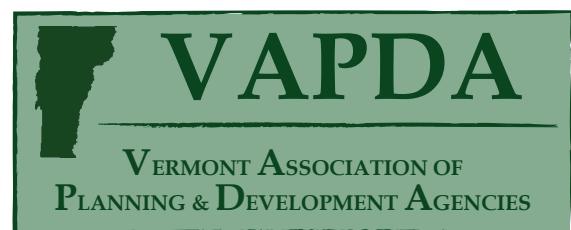
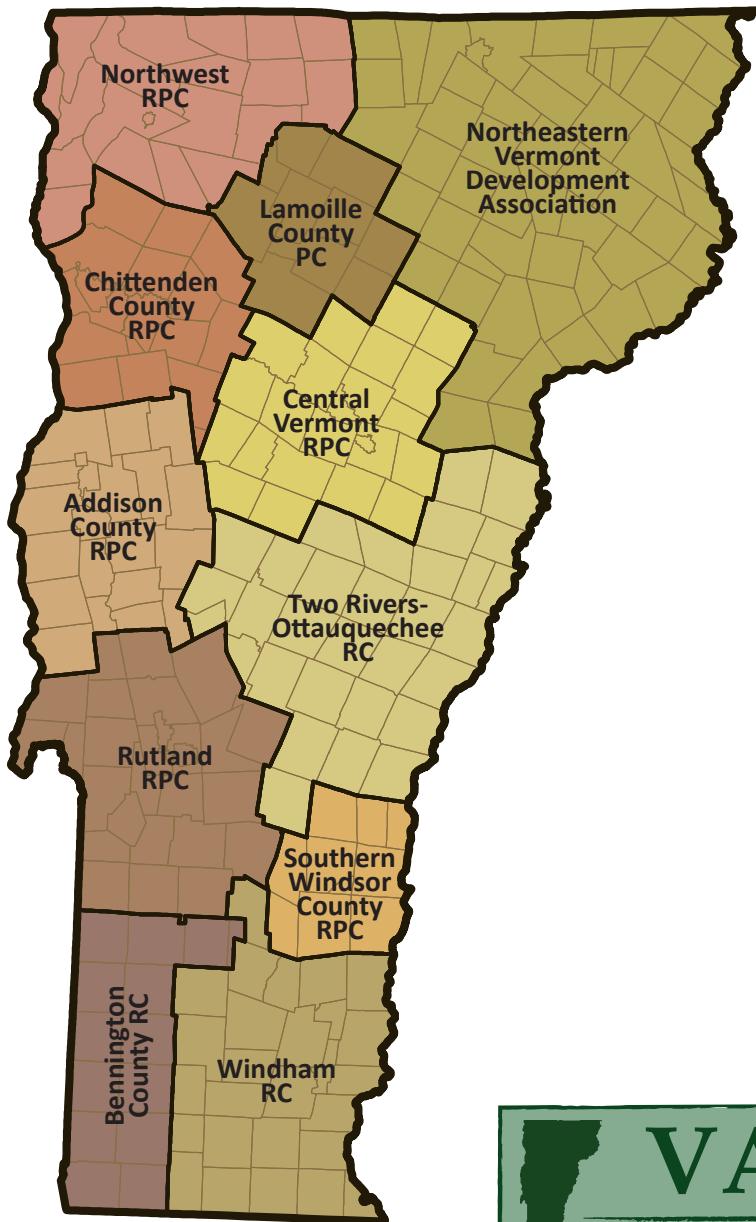


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VERMONT ASSOCIATION OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies Fiscal Year 2014 Annual Report

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, brownfields, energy, and economic development.
- ❖ RPCs maximize the recovery of federal dollars for our economy, our environment and our communities.

Economic and Community Development

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

VAPDA actively participated in the development of Vermont's Statewide Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy ensuring local and regional priorities were heard.

Bennington and Windham County Regional Commissions cooperated in an initiative (funded by the US Economic Development Administration) to help their business community recover after Tropical Storm Irene, revitalize their downtowns and develop a regional marketing program.

Natural Resources

The backbone of Vermont's heritage and economic viability is the working landscape, and 75% of Vermont's land is forested. Lamoille County Planning Commission serves as RPC-lead for a 3-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. 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. A new web-based platform will increase access to information, tools, and support for forest owners and managers, planners and citizens.



Telecommunications

Vermont's desire to expand access to broadband in the state has created numerous applications for telecommunications towers. Towns want to know what service would be coming to what areas and when, and what their options are to provide input into the tower permitting process.

To assist, the Windham Regional Commission organized a meeting for towns with staff from the Vermont Telecommunications Authority and the Vermont Council on Rural Development to discuss not only plans for service, but also how and when towns could effectively participate in the process. RPCs regularly work with their municipalities to help them understand the state tower permitting processes under Section 248a and Act 250, the town role in those processes, the relevance of town plans and zoning bylaws, and how towns can represent their policies to both applicants and regulating authorities.

Strategic Planning

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) has worked with a coalition of local officials and business leaders in the Bennington area to implement specific recommendations from the economic development strategy prepared last year by the BCRC. As part of that effort, the BCRC has helped plan and launch a new business-directed internship program, completed a detailed study of the community's workforce housing needs, and helped explore options for mixed use development on vacant lots in the downtown. The BCRC also has worked with Amtrak and VTrans to explore ways to improve access to the region through direct transit connections to the passenger rail station in Rensselaer, New York.



The BCRC worked with local officials and business leaders to demonstrate conceptual building and site designs showing how vacant properties in downtown Bennington could support mixed use development.

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. RPCs work to maximize brownfield funding available to Vermont and within the State by sharing and leveraging EPA funds across regional boundaries.



Algiers Village Affordable Housing- assessment and clean up led to twenty new units of affordable housing in Guilford; Photo Credit: Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

Assessment, Clean Up and Redevelopment

The Windham Region Brownfields Reuse Initiative (WRBRI) was established in 2000 with funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). All together this funding has brought a total of \$3.15 million dollars in federal brownfields funds to the region. WRC's active environmental assessment program has assessed 45 sites throughout the region, mostly in downtowns and villages. Thirty-three percent of the sites were investigated for redevelopment by private investors and the remaining 67% percent were developed by municipal and non-profit organizations. In 2011, WRC established a million dollar revolving loan fund to assist with redevelopment of these contaminated properties. To date, WRC has granted \$377,730 to non-profits and municipalities and loaned \$196,500 to private and non-profit entities.

Downtown Revitalization

In the Town of Richford, Northwest Regional Planning Commission completed a Village Center area plan with brownfields assessment funds. Priorities of the effort included:

- ❖ Make Main Street an attractive and welcoming place.
- ❖ Cleanup hazardous waste and contaminated sites.
- ❖ Develop Missisquoi Park with river access, bike path, and recreation facilities.
- ❖ Redevelop four prominent buildings for commercial use.

32 River Street



2 Main Street



61 Main Street



1 Main Street



Sponsored by REAC and NRPC, with support from Community Organizations, the Town of Richford, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

As a result of the plan, NRPC is working with the Richford Economic Advancement Corporation to clean up and redevelop a formerly abandoned property.

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 and 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. Local and regional planning funds, local contributions and other grants all support this land use work.

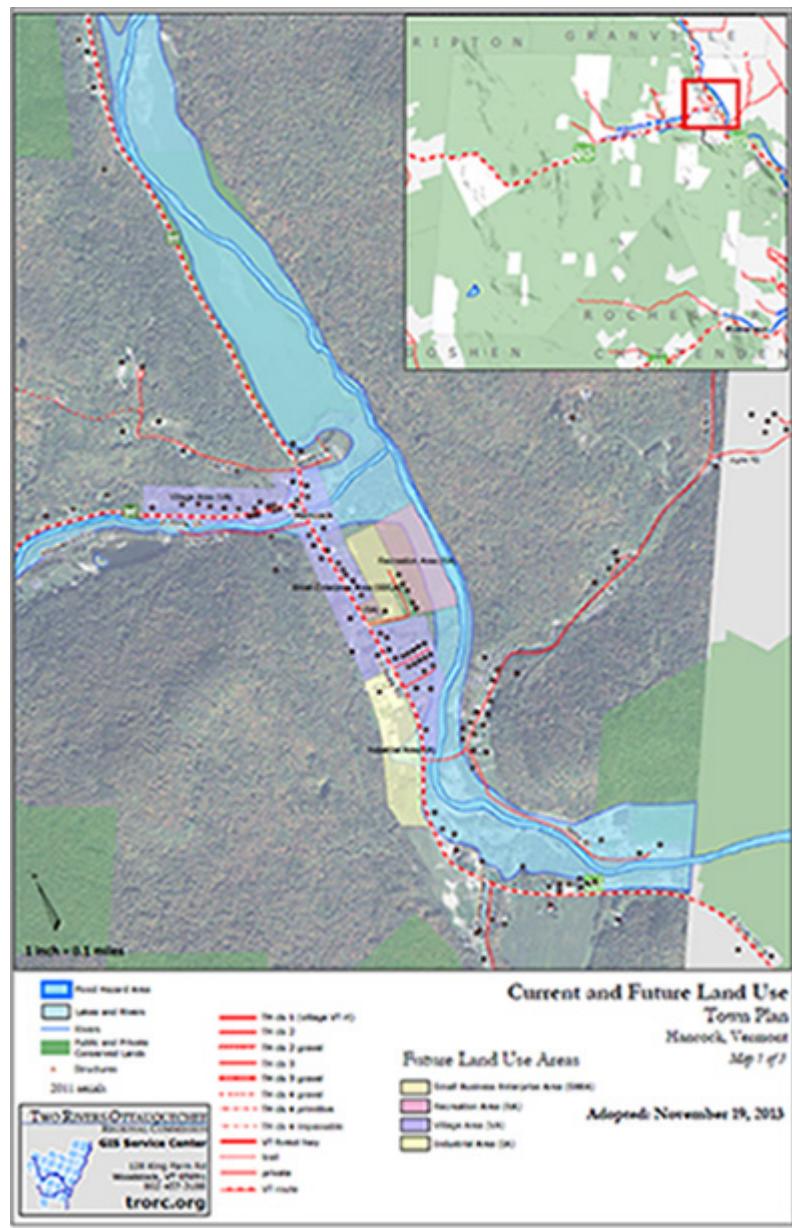
Utilizing their local planning and GIS expertise the 3 northern RPCs worked with the VT Center for Geographic information on a parcel mapping effort in 19 municipalities that will result in better data for local and regional development planning.

RPCs developed model plan elements for the new flood resiliency requirement and worked with communities with designated villages and downtowns to incorporate newly required planning standards.

All RPCs conducted trainings on Village Centers/Neighborhood designation and on encouraging the development of affordable housing. Collectively the RPCs prepared the training modules, conducted train-the-trainer sessions and presented at statewide and regional venues. Survey results indicated municipal officials learned useful information.

Local and Regional Cooperation

In 2013, the Hancock Selectboard approached the Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) about their interest in joining the Village Designation Program. The town needed an approved plan to join the program. After several failed attempts to undertake revisions to the Plan (Hancock's population of just over 300 limits volunteerism), the Regional Commission proposed that the community take advantage of a rarely utilized part of state statute which would allow the Regional Planning Commission to act as the Hancock Planning Commission. The Selectboard agreed, and appointed a Planning Commission including several



Hancock residents, members of the TRORC Board and TRORC staff. Within several months the Planning Commission drafted a Plan that was then locally adopted and regionally approved. With an approved municipal plan and help from the Regional Commission the town of Hancock applied for entry into the Village Designation Program. The Vermont Downtown Board voted to grant Hancock Village Designation status in March of 2014 and in August the Gathering Inn, located in Hancock's small village, was awarded \$12,638 in tax credits through the Vermont Village Designation Program.

Encouraging Mixed Use Development

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission worked with the town of Weybridge to update its zoning regulations. The update focused on increasing density in Weybridge's village center area and their existing compact residential areas, including the areas near Pulp Mill Bridge Road adjacent to Middlebury. Weybridge wanted to allow for smaller, more affordable lots close to their village school and to build on those areas with existing high-density settlement patterns. Their decision process included a three hour tour verifying the character of each distinct area, letters to all residents and an open house. The Selectboard adopted Weybridge's new zoning at the end of FY2014.

Transportation Planning

Through contracts 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.



Several RPCs actively worked with VTrans to develop Act 145 which was passed by the legislature and became law in 2014. Through uniform, prorated transportation impact fees, Act 145 will allow greater equity in the review and funding of transportation improvements that support growth and development.

RPCs worked with ANR and VTrans to create an easily accessible online tool for municipalities to manage culvert inventories.

The RPCs assist VTrans with public outreach for construction projects and collaborate on regional Highway Safety seminars.

Sharing Best Practices

The Rutland Regional Planning Commission has successfully coordinated a monthly meeting of the Region's Road Commissioners/Foremen. Locations of meetings move to different town garages and topics are pertinent to their work. Town managers and Selectboard members also attend. The meetings provide vital networking and educational opportunities through information sharing, guest

speakers and expert presentations. In FY14 topics included VTrans' DMV Safety and Enforcement, Excel 101 and a Timesheet Program for highway departments, the District Transportation Administrator, Sidewalk Inventory Projects in three towns, Lake Champlain Restoration Plan, Hazard Communication Plan and Global Harmonization System, Complete Streets, Hazard Trees in the Right-of-Way, Bulk Purchasing, and Winter Maintenance.



Public Private Partnerships

Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) continued to coordinate implementation of the 20-year Smugglers Notch Scenic Highway plan and managed the Barnes Camp Visitor Center construction project. The project's public-private partners include the six landowners, LCPC, and representatives from municipalities and economic development. Guided by the Smugglers Notch Scenic Highway Corridor Management Plan, the partnership is implementing a series of projects to protect the natural and cultural resources along the highway, enhance existing facilities and create new facilities that disperse

recreational use, and provide educational information to nurture a safe and enjoyable experience for the traveling public. LCPC provides project management services, facilitates partnership meetings, and acts as fiscal agent for grants and the new Visitor Center.

New Transportation Choices

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), in collaboration with the Agency of Transportation, convened the CIRC Alternatives Task Force, consisting of 23 representatives of the Towns of Colchester, Essex, Williston, the Village of Essex Junction, state agencies, CCTA, the bicycle and pedestrian community, environmental groups, and the business community. The Task Force's charge was to identify a list of immediate, mid- and long-term recommendations for projects and planning activities to address the transportation needs in the region. The Task Force arrived at consensus on 34 projects with an estimated total implementation cost of \$99 million. The Phase I and II implementation projects were approved for inclusion in the VTrans Capital Program by the Legislature. <http://www.ccrcvt.org/transportation/corridors/circ-alternatives-task-force/>



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 provide direct staff support to the State

Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the Local Emergency Planning Committees and coordination among 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 as needed in special circumstances like Tropical Storm Irene and other declared disasters.

Coordinating Local and Statewide Operations

Each RPC has at least three staff members trained to staff the State Emergency Operation Center. All RPCs participated in at least one activation of the SEOC, and all participated in VT Yankee drills and the statewide Catastrophic Exercise held in June. 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 now have a formal role in assisting the SEOC with situational awareness and municipal damage reporting and will follow established protocols to ensure statewide consistency during an event.

RPCs assist municipalities in their efforts to comply with the requirements of the Emergency Relief Assistance Fund Rule (ERAF) in order to be eligible for a reduced local match in the event of a declared disaster. RPCs provide technical assistance on flood hazard and river corridor bylaws, local emergency operations plans and local hazard mitigation plans.

Better Planning for Mutual Aid

Local Emergency Operations Plans are the main emergency plans that towns annually update. These plans have critical contact information and well as data on shelters, vulnerable areas and emergency operations centers. This year there was also a big push to "type" (or categorize) equipment that towns have according to federal resource typing standards. TRORC provided detailed assistance to towns to not only do the annual update but to perform this unfamiliar task. Having good typing will make it easier to know the exact capacity of town personnel and equipment, and this will enable more precise and efficient mutual aid requests from other towns or the state.

Regional Planning

RPC's 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 are amending their regional plans in response to an independent evaluation sponsored by VAPDA which examined plans for consistency with statutory requirements and effectiveness in achieving goals. RPCs will have adopted new or amended plans by the end of 2015.

The RPCs and RDCs for the six northern counties successfully applied for reorganization of a federally recognized Economic Development District for Northern VT.

All RPCs continue to participate in Act 250 and Section 248 regulatory processes to further the goals of the regional plans. RPCs commented on 79 Act 250 major applications statewide for projects and 39 Section 248 applications. The Rutland Regional Commission, Southern Windsor County RPC and the Two Rivers-Ottauquechee RPC have been working together on transportation issues related to a significant development proposed at Killington Ski Resort.

Planning for the Future

Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission and the Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission have partnered on a joint regional planning effort that involves over 39 towns and organizations that have joined the Consortium. The primary outcome of this project is to



develop a vision for how to make Windsor and Orange Counties a better place to live, work and play. The resulting plan will include policies and recommendations that will promote more efficient, affordable, safe and healthy

patterns and forms of land use. This project is funded primarily through a Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Community Regional Planning Grant.

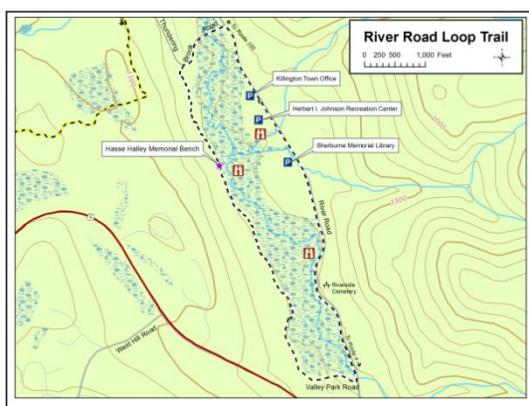


Planning for Growth and Development

Northeastern Vermont Development Association is conducting a regional study to assess the potential impact of proposed EB-5 developments in Jay and Burke and adjacent communities. The study is multi-faceted and includes build-out analyses of three village centers: Jay, West Burke and East Burke - all areas that have the potential to experience growth and absorb some demand for workforce and affordable housing. The project also involves the delineation of potential village centers in impacted communities, profiles of existing housing stock and recommendations for improving availability of housing. Other aspects of the study involve updated information on utilities and facilities for the impacted communities. Finally, the project also involves a study of existing development patterns in the Northeast Kingdom - mainly rural residential - and will be accompanied by recommendations for protecting working lands that may be endangered by rural residential sprawl.

Geographic Information System Services

RPCs use Geographic Information System 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.



Protecting the Working Landscape

Northeastern Vermont Development Association is currently assisting the Town of Sutton to identify its most valuable working lands using GIS analysis. The analysis will help to inform the delineation of a proposed Working Lands Overlay. This overlay will define areas proposed for density based land use regulations aimed at protecting viable tracts of agricultural & forest lands. Sutton's current Town Plan (adopted in 2013) recommends a revision to its zoning bylaws. The plan recognizes the limits of large lot zoning (minimum of 10

acres) in protecting its forests and farmland and suggests considering alternate strategies, such as a density-based approach. This project will help the town identify the areas that may benefit most from alternate zoning strategies.

Providing Information for Municipalities

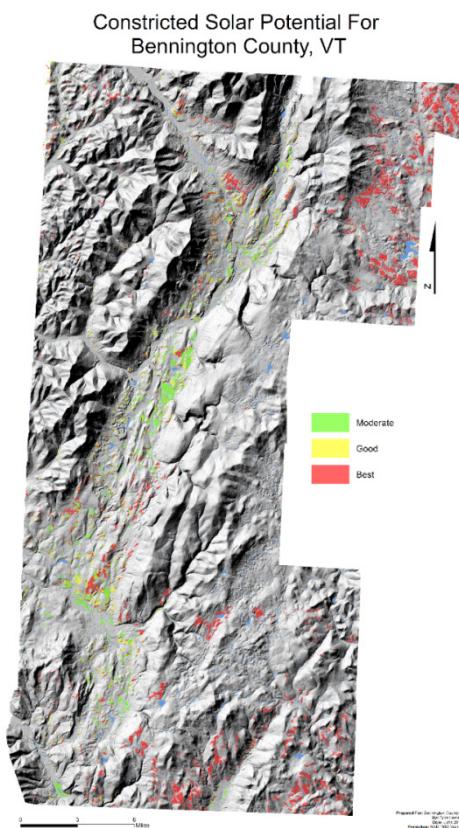
The Rutland RPC used their GIS capabilities on a number of municipal assistance projects including:

- ❖ The Better Back Road program, which funded five town culvert inventories and updates to <http://vtculverts.org>.
 - ❖ Flood and critical facilities mapping, as part of FEMA buyouts, town requests, regional plan updates, hazard mitigation planning and the VT Economic Resilience Initiative project.
 - ❖ Transportation projects such as developing a Region-wide bike map complete with elevation profiles and distances.



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, 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.



RPCs had extensive involvement in recent energy generation siting commission proceedings and subsequent follow-up with the Public Service Department - developing a scope for regional energy planning work across the state. RPCs are coordinating outreach on building energy standards and local requirements during permitting and working with Efficiency Vermont to follow-up with municipalities that had done some type of energy audit.

Energy Conservation and Generation

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) has worked to advance both energy conservation and renewable energy development in the region. A collaboration with NeighborWorks of Western Vermont has brought additional expertise on home weatherization programs to the BCRC and is making that organization's programs more accessible to Bennington County residents. The BCRC has worked closely with local officials, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, and a local developer to relicense and begin electricity generation at a long disused dam and hydroelectric facility on the Walloomsac River. In an effort to improve planning for future renewable energy

development in the region, the BCRC has completed a geographic analysis that identifies sites with good access to solar, wind, and hydroelectric resources that are not constrained by the presence of critical natural resources.

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 implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions. RPCs also serve as a technical resource for municipalities to implement local water quality projects, understand the implications of the Lake Champlain TMDL, and comply with new legislation on shorelands and river corridors. RPCs served as meeting facilitators for legislative meetings on the Shorelands Bill and provided information to legislative committees as requested.

RPCs worked with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation to support forest conservation and working lands enterprises that maintain healthy forests and watersheds. The initiative includes development of a web-based mapping system for landscape scale forest stewardship data that enables landowners and towns to access and understand the data and apply it to management situations as well as municipal and regional plan updates.

Green Infrastructure

With overall management by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, the RPCs are partnering with ANR to develop a Green Infrastructure Municipal Toolkit. The toolkit will be web-based and provide information to municipalities on best practices and ideas for implementing programs and regulations that foster on-site infiltration and management of stormwater rather than traditional engineering solutions of pipes and ponds.

Protecting and Improving River Corridors

A stream geomorphic assessment of the Great Brook was conducted by Bear Creek Environmental, LLC (BCE) under the direction of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. The study encompassed approximately 8.5 miles of stream channel, and was helpful in identifying major stressors to geomorphic stability in the Great Brook watershed. A list of 31 potential restoration and conservation projects was developed during project identification. Types of projects include: river corridor protection through easements, improving riparian buffers, bridge and culvert replacements, alternative analyses for the removal of old abutments, stream clean-up, and adopting best management practices for logging. A detailed study of landslide hazards along Great Brook was also conducted by Norwich University.



Special Projects

Community Health and Economic Development

Healthy People, Strong Communities is a regional partnership between community members, community-based organizations, businesses and local governments. Leading this partnership, Northwest Regional Planning Commission worked directly with these groups to: gather information and develop strategies for workforce development, career mentorship, substance abuse prevention, and disaster resiliency; ensure that the region is safe and inviting for all transportation modes including walking and biking; and to increase physical activity. Through over 20 public meetings and conversations with hundreds of residents of the region, the Steering Committee developed goals that served as the guide for implementation projects. Fourteen grants for a total of \$212,000 were given to local and regional organizations to implement projects in community health, business development, local foods, substance abuse and family support. The Healthy People, Strong Communities project will contribute to a healthier, more prosperous Northwest Vermont region where economic development and community health are treated as equally important and linked to one another. The project is funded through a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program. The list of projects can be found at <http://www.nrpcvt.com/healthystrong.html>.



The Healthy People, Strong Communities project aims to support job growth and inspire a happy, healthy and prosperous lifestyle for this generation and the next.

Complete Streets

Pulp Mill Bridge Road in Weybridge and Seymour Street in Middlebury constitute two legs of a very popular walking and cycling loop for residents of each community and students at Middlebury College. The remainder of the loop connects to Middlebury's downtown, the college campus and residential neighborhoods. Unfortunately, all of Pulp Mill Bridge Road and strategic portions of Seymour Street lack sidewalks or any other infrastructure to support biking or pedestrians. In 2013, ACRPC teamed up with the Towns of Middlebury and Weybridge, Phelps Engineering and Community Development Services to create a plan for infrastructure to support complete street movements in this popular area.



ACRPC served as project manager for the study, convening the Towns, organizing the public meetings and leading the project. After significant public input and support, the team completed the scoping study in May 2014. In June, 2014 the Towns agreed to pursue funding for the project and engaged ACRPC to work on their behalf to write a Transportation Alternatives grant. The successful application awarded the two towns \$770,000 to complete the sidewalks and other infrastructure linking Pulp Mill Bridge Road and Seymour Street to Middlebury's existing sidewalk network and downtown amenities.