



January 17, 2017

Regional Planning Commissions **Community and Economic Development**

Successful economic development flourishes when development efforts are partnered with long range and strategic planning. Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) work with municipalities, businesses, non-profits, regional development corporations (RDCs) and the state to develop comprehensive strategies to position each region of Vermont for long term economic success.

Brownfields. RPCs have sought and have been awarded over \$12 million from the US Environmental Protection Agency for brownfields redevelopment. This funding is highly competitive nationally and RPC success in bringing funding to Vermont has spurred substantial private sector investment.

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. Examples include a new hotel in the heart of St. Albans City, Algiers Village Housing in Guilford, and the Vermont Marble museum in Proctor.

Three RPCs, *Southern Windsor, Windham and Northwest*, manage revolving loan funds that provide loans and grants for site clean-up.

Infrastructure. RPCs coordinate with state and local officials to identify needed infrastructure to support community and economic development and search for funding to make these investments.

RPCs support local, regional, state, and federal transportation network improvements through the Transportation Planning Initiative funded by VTrans. Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission has also provided significant funding with VTrans for Transportation Demand Management initiatives: *Go! Chittenden County*, the 12th annual *Way to Go! Challenge* and *Travel Smarter* all provide more information about transportation choices for commuters and visitors.

RPCs integrate energy planning with land use, transportation, economic development and natural resources. All RPCs are currently drafting energy plans that focus on energy conservation, efficiency, renewable generation targets and siting guidance tied to Vermont's energy goals and Comprehensive Energy Plan.

Through a grant awarded by the Northern Border Regional Commission, *Lamoille County Planning Commission* worked with six municipalities along the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail to design and construct trailside amenities, develop a wayfinding system, and produce trail maps. Over seventeen miles of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail are now open for year-round recreational use from Morristown to Cambridge.

Economic Development Strategies. Regional Planning Commissions integrate economic development with other aspects of their work to build strong, resilient communities. This multi-disciplinary approach ensures efficient delivery of services for municipalities and the state.

Northwest Regional Planning Commission coordinated the re-establishment of the Northern Vermont Economic Development District in partnership with the three RDCs and RPCs in the six northern counties. This unique intergovernmental partnership won a 2016 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development

Organizations. Statewide, RPCs in partnership with RDCs manage federally designated Economic Development Districts in nine counties.

The *Bennington County Regional Commission* has entered into an agreement with the Bennington County Industrial Corporation (the designated regional development corporation for the area) to provide management and staffing for economic development planning in the region.

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission championed an effort to analyze and evaluate the existence and strength of the Region's Creative Economy and identify what needed to be done to support it and help it grow. Creative businesses have already revitalized some parts of the Region, and a number of others stand on the cusp of real growth possibilities.

Northeastern Vermont Development Association assisted Newport with *Newport Bienvenue!*, a long-range marketing and promotion campaign designed to draw Quebec businesses, consumers, and visitors to Newport City and drive Newport's economic growth.

Growth and development. RPCs work with communities to ensure that local permitting is effective and predictable. RPCs are a cost effective professional planning option for Vermont's municipalities, and technical assistance is provided to municipal planning commissions, zoning administrators, and other local officials. RPCs help communities modernize local plans and bylaws and ensure that the local officials have the knowledge necessary to fulfill their roles. Last year RPCs held 78 training events that included representatives from 73% of municipalities. This year, training will focus on the essentials of local permitting and rural economic development.

Working Landscape. The backbone of Vermont's heritage and economy is the working landscape. RPCs develop strategies and projects to support the working landscape and local food economy.

The *Windham Regional Commission*, in an effort to find ways to promote the region's important forest economy and the people's understanding of it, worked with a forestry workgroup and the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center on an exhibit *Shedding Light on the Working Forest*. A related panel discussion, Local Wood, Local Good, brought together representatives of forestry-related businesses to discuss how to develop markets for local wood products.

The **Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA)** 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 professional services to municipalities and the state. Vermont's RPCs fill a role often assumed by county governments in other states.

RPCs are governed by Boards made up primarily of local officials. Their strong connection to local government allows them to serve as an important bridge between local, state and federal governments. The RPCs have federal and state statutory responsibilities in transportation, land use, emergency management, environmental protection, brownfields, energy, and community and economic development. RPCs are effective at leveraging federal dollars to develop our economy, protect our environment and enhance our communities. For more information on VAPDA, or to link with any RPCs, please visit www.VAPDA.org.

