

**Sunset Advisory Commission**  
**Board and Commission Review of the Vermont Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission**

The Commission reviews every State board and commission and takes testimony regarding whether each board or commission should continue to operate or be eliminated and whether the powers and duties of any board or commission should be revised. Each board and commission has the burden of justifying its continued operation.

The Commission also reviews whether members of a board or commission should be entitled to a per diem and, if so, the amount of that per diem.

In testifying before the Commission, you should be able to provide the following information:

1. In general, how often does the board and commission meet? Provide specific information on how often the board or commission has met in the past two fiscal years. Provide information on where agendas and minutes of meetings can be found.

The full joint commissions – the Connecticut River Joint Commissions (CRJC) - meets quarterly. An Executive Committee of six, consisting of leadership elected from each of the state’s commissions, meets between full commission meetings six times per year to conduct ongoing business and program oversight.

Additionally, local river subcommittees meet bi-monthly to work on projects and activities in their local river segment regions.

All reports can be found on the CRJC website found at [www.crjc.org](http://www.crjc.org).

2. Provide the names of members of the board or commission, their term length and expiration, their appointing authority, and the amount of any per diem they receive.

Per statute, the Vermont commission consists of 15 members: the Secretary of Natural Resources; one member selected by each of the five regional planning commissions bordering the Connecticut River and nine at-large members appointed by the Governor who shall be residents of the Connecticut River watershed. The at-large members may include persons who are members of the General Assembly and shall include others who represent diverse interests such as forestry, tourism, fishing, boating, and land preservation and historic preservation. One or more members shall be actively farming land they own bordering the Connecticut River or its tributaries. New Hampshire statute ostensibly mirrors that of Vermont. Please see the attached list. The members receive no per diem.

3. Provide an overview of the board or commission’s purpose.

The State of Vermont created the Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission (10 V.S.A. § 1193) to develop ways to cooperate, and to initiate and encourage, interstate

cooperation and coordination with and between appropriate officers of the State of Vermont and the state of New Hampshire to guide development in the Connecticut River Valley. The enabling statute states that it is the policy of Vermont to, “join with the state of New Hampshire in a common effort to ensure that development within the Connecticut River watershed proceeds in ways that protect its outstanding ecological, scenic, recreational, historic, cultural, agricultural, fish, and wildlife values.” The Vermont Commission joins with the New Hampshire Connecticut River Valley Resource Commission to create the Connecticut River Joint Commissions (CRJC). The CRJC provides the mechanism of cooperation between the two states to guide development in the Connecticut River Valley in a way which is to maximize the visual, ecological, and agricultural integrity of the Connecticut River Watershed.

To execute its purpose, the CRJC supports five local river subcommittees, composed of over a hundred citizens appointed by the legislative bodies of riverfront Vermont and New Hampshire municipalities to give voice to the interests of local business, local government, conservation, agriculture, recreation, and riverfront landowners.

4. Is that purpose still needed? What would happen if the board or commission no longer fulfilled that purpose?

Yes. The purpose of the Commission is still needed and only increasing in relevance. The CRJC recently approved (June, 2020) a strategic plan that specifically reevaluated its mission and purpose beginning with this same question: is it still needed and, if so, what should its function be and how should that function be executed. For several years the CRJC has been finding its way as it has evolved from an organization with its own staff to support its full range of responsibilities to an organization that relies upon contracted services to provide administrative support to the commissioners and local river subcommittees that do the work. Recent focus had been on how to improve water quality and the general health of the main stem Connecticut River, with an emphasis on following the relicensing of dams. We are now turning back to the original statutory purpose of the Commission. As is noted in the new strategic plan, which the CRJC has begun implementing:

“We anticipate the Connecticut River Valley will see substantial growth related to migration from metropolitan areas to our east and south driven by climate change and sea level rise, as well as the current pandemic. The need for facilitated cooperation and coordination between the two states on development within the watershed will only increase.

The actions proposed in this plan leverage the group’s strongest assets: the passion and commitment of the volunteer members and Commissioners, and its statutorily-enabled purpose and connection to state government. In the short term, these strategic leverage points will build internal capacity to help sustain the organization. Over time and amidst those global challenges, the CRJC intends to continue serving communities of the Valley by helping to guide the growth and development in a way that conserves landscape integrity and stewards the use of its natural resources.

The CRJC is well-situated to play a convening and advocating role, and understands that this work is most effective in partnership with existing organizations and initiatives. The CRJC values connection, advocacy, and mutual support, and is therefore dedicated to elevating collective efforts and collaborating with like-minded partners.”

The full strategic plan is available here: [http://www.cric.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CRJC\\_StrategicPlan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.cric.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CRJC_StrategicPlan_FINAL.pdf)

In the absence of the Vermont Commission serving its purpose, in partnership with the New Hampshire Commission through the CRJC, both Vermont and New Hampshire would likely have to recreate the same or similar structures and processes to provide a means by which to engage both states in planning for the development of the Connecticut River watershed and valley. Such an entity will also be necessary to assist with the development and implementation of strategies to meet the forthcoming nitrogen TMDL requirements for Long Island Sound.

5. How well is the board or commission performing in executing that purpose? What evidence can you provide to substantiate that performance?

The fact that the Commission, through the CRJC, recently initiated its own evaluation of its purpose and relevance *without* a goal of justifying its continued existence is a sign of its health. The engagement of all Commissioners in the strategic planning process was vigorous, as was the willingness to challenge all assumptions about the need for the Commission’s continued existence. The outcome was a clear vision of the need to engage the two states and local communities to plan for and guide the development of the Connecticut River watershed and valley in a way that protects its natural, cultural and human resources, is evidence of the commission’s health and ability to perform, and specifically how the CRJC could perform that function.

6. If the purpose is still needed, can State government be more effective and efficient if the purpose was executed in a different manner?

State government and its agencies should more fully recognize the Connecticut River Valley as a unique region of Vermont that is shared with New Hampshire where increased residential and economic growth is likely, where abundant natural, human and cultural resources will require shared protection, and where the water quality and health of the main stem Connecticut River has direct local impacts as well as downstream impacts on the Long Island Sound. Vermont should, at a minimum, give the Connecticut River Valley the same level of attention that it gives to the Champlain Basin and Burlington. The Connecticut River Valley has the potential to quickly become the new growth engine for the state given its connection to megalopolis New England. The Valley is easily accessible by both interstate and passenger and freight rail, and is within 2 ½ hours of Boston and 4 hours of New York (not to mention numerous smaller cities and metropolitan areas in between). It remains to be seen how the current surge in real estate activity will translate into longer term settlement and investment patterns, but the CRJC believes the Valley will be a

destination as global warming and climate change force changes in the northeast. Three recent articles about climate-induced migration research provide support our assumptions.

- How Climate Migration Will Reshape America (NY Times Magazine, 9/15/20) <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/15/magazine/climate-crisis-migration-america.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage>

“The millions of people moving north will mostly head to the cities of the Northeast and Northwest, which will see their populations grow by roughly 10 percent, according to one model. Once-chilly places like Minnesota and Michigan and Vermont will become more temperate, verdant and inviting. Vast regions will prosper; just as Hsiang’s research forecast that Southern counties could see a tenth of their economy dry up, he projects that others as far as North Dakota and Minnesota will enjoy a corresponding expansion. Cities like Detroit, Rochester, Buffalo and Milwaukee will see a renaissance, with their excess capacity in infrastructure, water supplies and highways once again put to good use. One day, it’s possible that a high-speed rail line could race across the Dakotas, through Idaho’s up-and-coming wine country and the country’s new breadbasket along the Canadian border, to the megalopolis of Seattle, which by then has nearly merged with Vancouver to its north.”

- New Climate Maps Show A Transformed United States (ProPublica, 9/15/20) <https://projects.propublica.org/climate-migration/>

“In a [paper](#) published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a team of researchers modeled the human climate “niche”: the regions where temperature and precipitation have been most suitable for humans to live in over the past 6,000 years. But as the climate warms, the niche could shift drastically northward. Under even a moderate carbon emissions scenario (known as RCP 4.5), by 2070 much of the Southeast becomes less suitable and the niche shifts toward the Midwest. In the case of extreme warming (represented as RCP 8.5), the niche moves sharply toward Canada, leaving much of the lower half of the U.S. too hot or dry for the type of climate humans historically have lived in. Both scenarios suggest massive upheavals in where Americans currently live and grow food.”

- Climate change: Could ‘climigration’ help reverse Vermont population trends? (VT Digger, 9/17/19) <https://vtdigger.org/2019/09/17/climate-change-will-vermonts-population-increase-from-climigration/>

“The EPA has ranked Vermont [fourth](#) in a nationwide assessment of resilience to extreme weather events brought on by climate change. And authors of the [2014 state climate assessment](#) wrote that Vermont might be a ‘receiving state’ for residents of Northeast cities dealing with sea level rise.”

7. If the purpose is still needed, do any of your board or commission's functions overlap or duplicate those of another State board or commission or federal or State agency? If so, is your board or commission still the best entity to fulfill the purpose?

We are not aware of any overlap or duplication of function with those of any other state board, commission, or federal or state agency. The Vermont Commission is the only group that is statutorily charged to engage this bi-state collaboration with a joint New Hampshire Commission. A question we do have for the state is what entity will provide the Clean Water Service Provider function for the main stem Connecticut River? The Vermont Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission could potentially serve this function. Other entities will serve this function for tributaries to the Connecticut River. The CRJC would also be a logical structure through which Vermont and New Hampshire could collaborate on addressing the forthcoming TMDL for nitrogen in Long Island Sound.

8. Does the board or commission's enabling law continue to correctly reflect the purpose and activities of the board or commission?

We confirmed through the recent strategic planning function that the enabling law correctly reflects the purpose and activities of the Commission and the CRJC.

9. Provide a list of the board and commission's last fiscal year expenditures including staffing costs. How are these funded?

The Commission relies upon funding from the state of Vermont, together with funding from the state of New Hampshire. At this time the Vermont state budget for FY2021 includes no funding for the Commission or the CRJC. The June statement attached for FY2020 year-end and FY2019, along with the FY2019 IRS form 990, are attached.

10. Is the board or commission required by law to prepare any reports or studies for the Legislature, the Governor, or any State agency or officer? If so, have those reports or studies been produced? Does the board or commission have ongoing reporting obligations?

The CRJC provides both states bimonthly progress reports as a requirement of their funding agreements. The funding agreements include a scope of work for the commission annually.

The CRJC's annual reports are available here: <https://www.crjc.org/about-crjc/annual-reports/>

The Local River Subcommittee annual reports are available by hovering over the "Local River Subcommittee" tab on the top of the CRJC homepage: <https://www.crjc.org/>

11. How would you measure the performance of the board or commission?

- The extent to which the CRJC is able to execute its 2020 strategic plan? (Note: this will be largely contingent upon the restoration of funding by the State of Vermont.)

- The relevance of the CRJC can be evaluated by the extent to which it is able to convene state policy makers and agencies, regional planning commissions, regional development entities, local governments, and other stakeholders in discussions about the development of the Connecticut River watershed and valley and the protection of its resources.

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