



February 4, 2021

Rep. Michael Marcotte, Chair
House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
115 State St.
Montpelier, VT. 05633

Tasha Wallis, LCPC

President

Catherine Dimitruk, NRPC

Vice-President

Charlie Baker, CCRPC

Secretary/Treasurer

Re: FY 22 Appropriations to the Municipal and Regional Planning Fund (MRPF)

Dear Chair Marcotte and Committee Members:

On behalf of all eleven RPCs that cover the entire state, we want to thank you for your past support for the investments the Legislature has made in planning and project development in our towns and regions. This funding support has been critical to the RPC's ability to assist in COVID response, emergency management, transportation, housing, energy, food security, land use planning, and economic development.

The demands being placed on RPCs are greater than ever, due to the increased needs of municipalities as they try to address economic and social uncertainty associated with the pandemic. Vermont's communities have seen an influx of state and federal funds at an unprecedented level, however, many of our communities had to rely on RPCs to provide grant writing and administration so they could participate in federal and state recovery programs. The RPCs, throughout Vermont, have been a consistent statewide resource for our communities, as we were with Tropical Storm Irene, in providing this critical assistance.

The receipts from the Property Transfer Tax (PTT) are near record levels due to the real estate boom in Vermont. **The RPCs have not had an increase in funding since 2014.** During this period, the operating costs for RPCs have increased dramatically, while at the same time, the demands for RPC services have also increased, creating an unsustainable financial situation for RPCs.

The RPCs have a long history of providing statewide, comprehensive, efficient program delivery. The influx of federal funds coming into Vermont can and will overwhelm many of our smaller towns, creating inequities between those communities who can apply and manage the funds and those who cannot. The RPCs can ensure that the communities that do not have the capacity will receive assistance.

We ask your support in seeking an additional \$700,000 in Funding in FY 22 from the House Appropriations Committee.

What will the RPCs accomplish with the additional investment?

Strengthening the Capability of Governments

Broadband

- Work with the Legislature, Department of Public Service, and telecommunication providers in the expansion of broadband for low and moderate-income households and households with poor broadband service.
- Work with municipalities and community groups to secure grant funding to facilitate the formation of the CUDs; commission broadband feasibility studies and broadband business plans, and assist the CUDs in hiring staff and procurement.

Housing and Land Use Planning

- Work with housing providers and other non-profits in the prioritization and creation of housing for older adults-, low- and moderate-income families, and vulnerable Vermonters.
- Work with VHFA, Community Action Agencies, and other agencies in the implementation and administration of weatherization programs.
- Work with our communities on the expansion of State designations in our downtowns, villages, and new neighborhoods so communities can take advantage of Vermont's Tax Credit Programs.
- Work with our communities to modernize zoning bylaws and other land use regulations to encourage the development of affordable housing.

Statewide Economic Development Plan

- Work with stakeholders to facilitate the review of all substate economic development strategies and state-level economic development plans to create a state Economic Development Policy and Action Plan that guides public and private investment.

Municipal Water and Sewer

- Work with the Agency of Natural Resources to develop a cost-effective methodology for the development of small water and waste-water systems in communities that would allow for greater housing density and commercial and industrial development in smart growth locations.

We would welcome the opportunity to appear before your Committee to discuss this proposal and other programs offered by Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions. We look forward to working with the Legislature during these difficult times in addressing the needs of Vermonters.

Sincerely,

Thomas Kennedy

Thomas J. Kennedy, AICP
Chair, VAPDA Government Relations Committee