



House Committee on
Commerce and Economic Development

January 17, 2024

Charlie Baker, Executive Director, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

Catherine Dimitruk, Chair, Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies



Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) strengthen the capability of municipalities.



In the absence of county government, RPCs play a critical role in connecting communities with federal and state programs.

RPCs are political subdivisions of the State of Vermont, uniquely positioned to **provide broad services** to every Vermont municipality:



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING



LAND USE PLANNING



WATER QUALITY



HAZARD MITIGATION & PREPAREDNESS



AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN ALL AREAS



HOUSING



BROWNFIELD ASSESSMENT & REMEDIATION



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



ENERGY PLANNING

Quick Facts / FY23 Highlights



Vermont has **11** RPCs and **125** staff.



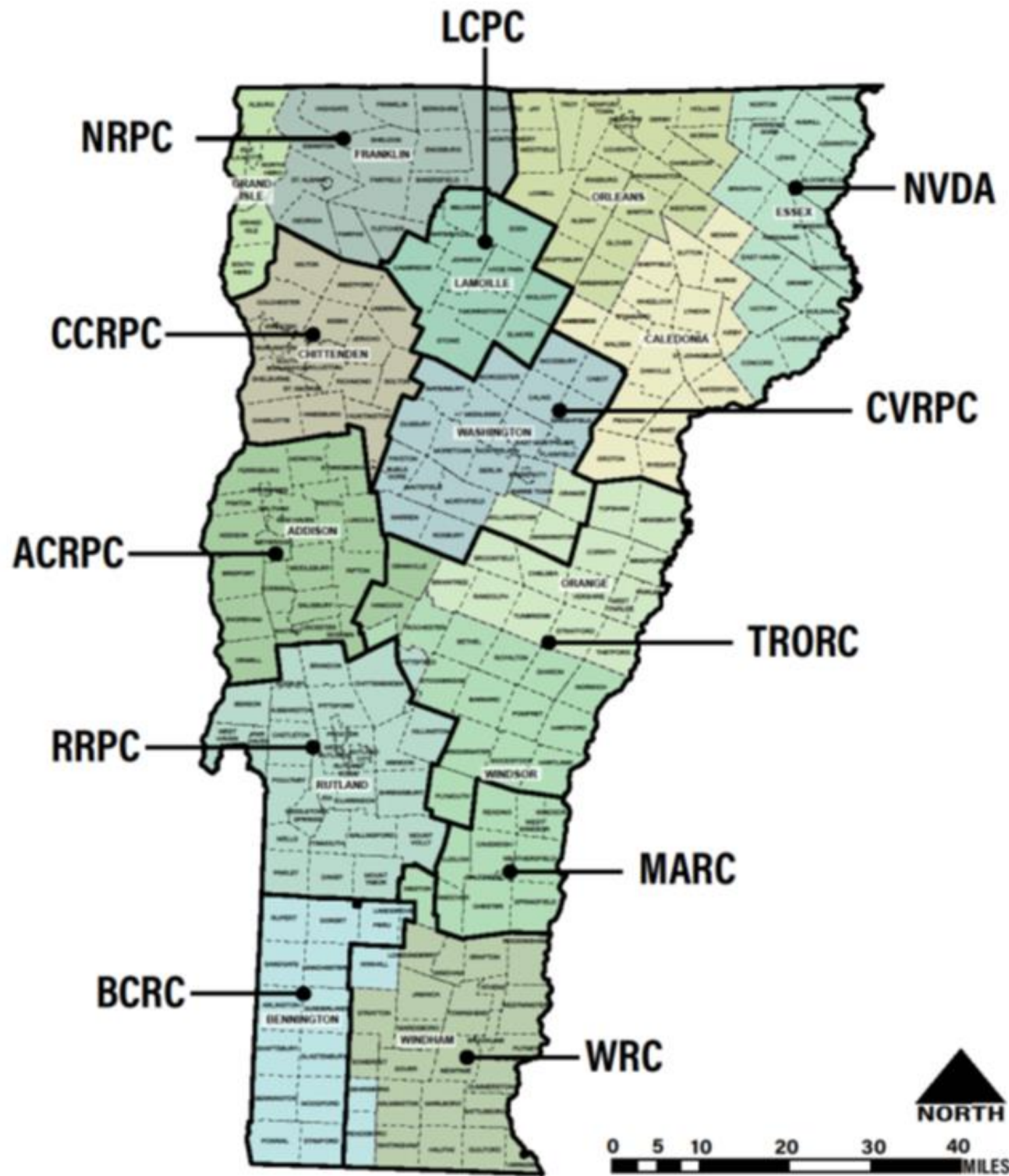
145 communities received economic development assistance from their RPCs in FY23, strengthening their local economies.



42 communities were able to assess or remediate polluted land with the support of RPCs in FY23.



The West Central Vermont CEDS was approved by the EDA in June 2023.



**STATE OF VERMONT
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS**



Visit VAPDA.org for more information about each RPC in VT



State Policy

RPCs are a critical resource for the state in policy deliberations and implementation.



RPCs are a direct link between municipalities and state government and are often called upon to support policy development and implementation in the areas of housing, economic development, brownfields, energy, transportation, water quality, and more.



Windham Regional Commission Executive Director Chris Company was appointed to the Vermont Climate Council to represent municipal interests. He served on the Council Steering Committee, Just Transitions Subcommittee, Cross Sector Mitigation Subcommittee, and Transportation Task Group.



Regional Planning

At the regional level, RPCs coordinate community plans with regional plans, and provide key insights for communities through regional studies.



This region-wide perspective enables a broader understanding of the trends and regional dynamics that drive planning and investment decisions.



The HOME Act required RPCs to complete a Future Land Use study that recommends changes to regional plans to support Act 250 and Designation reforms and to help guide state investment decisions.



Housing



In FY23, RPCs helped **96** communities with housing.



In FY23, RPCs provided **181** municipalities with planning and bylaw assistance and are increasingly supporting infrastructure development to make new housing more affordable.

Many of these bylaw efforts support increased densities in our centers. More work is needed to balance the planning and zoning work with the permitting system, and to have the necessary infrastructure in place.



Northwest RPC published the *2022 Northwest Housing Needs Assessment* to inform its goals and priorities for addressing the housing crisis, and to update the housing portion of the Northwest Regional Plan, which was adopted in August 2023.

Housing

Act 47 - HOME Act (S.100) required *four studies* related to Act 250, State Designations, and Regional Planning.

Broadly: Need to update Act 250 & Chapter 117 to accomplish smart growth goals and make it easier to build more housing in planned growth areas



encouraging development in our centers

AND



preserving our rural areas.



Chittenden County RPC continues to partner with Housing Vermont and Champlain Housing Trust on the *Building Homes Together* campaign to build 5,000 homes by 2025, including 1,250 affordable homes.



Housing Navigators

A subsection of S.100 provides one year of funding to each of the state's RPCs for a **housing resource navigator** to work with interested communities on pairing their housing needs and opportunities with interested developers and financiers.

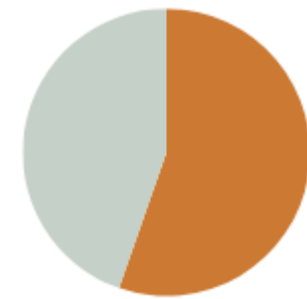


\$300,000 across 11 RPCs (\$27,273 each)

RPCs are to “work with municipalities, regional and local housing organizations, and private developers to identify housing opportunities, match communities with funding resources, and provide project management support.”



Economic Development



145 communities received economic development assistance from their RPCs in FY23, strengthening local economies.

Strong local economies arise from comprehensive land-use planning and united development efforts.

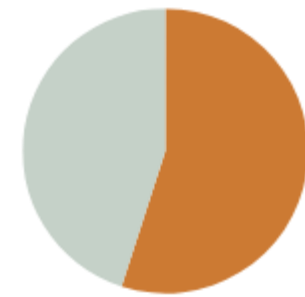
RPCs help build community infrastructure and guide development patterns in order to provide the foundation and public support for private economic development.



Bennington County Regional Commission staff conducted 82 business visits in FY23, including large manufacturers and healthcare providers, nonprofit museums and land trusts, art galleries, agricultural producers, downtown retail, food service, real estate offices, and new business startups.



Economic Development



RPCs helped **144** communities apply for grants that help those communities receive the financial resources they need to operate and grow.

RPCs work with municipalities as well as local and Regional Development Corporations to strengthen Vermont's economies. These organizations collaborate to:

- ✓ Create economic development sections in town and regional plans
- ✓ Help municipalities plan and develop critical infrastructure
- ✓ Develop comprehensive strategies

West Central Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

With federal funding from the US Economic Development Administration (EDA), the RPCs and RDCs serving West Central Vermont (***Addison County, Chittenden County, Rutland County, Washington County*** and part of ***Orange County***) worked together to develop a CEDS that was approved by the EDA in June 2023.



The CEDS identifies priority economic development strategies and projects and will be used by a variety of federal and state funding programs when making grant decisions.



All of Vermont is now covered by an approved CEDS; 6 Counties are in an EDA approved District (NVEDD).



Brownfields



By assessing, remediating, and reinvesting in these properties with the help of RPCs, communities can achieve a variety of benefits:

- ✓ INCREASE LOCAL TAX BASES
- ✓ EXPAND LOCAL HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY STOCK
- ✓ IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH
- ✓ ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- ✓ CREATE JOBS

- **42** communities were able to assess or remediate polluted land with the support of RPCs in FY23.
- \$1M in FY22 Brownfield Funding fully disbursed across all 11 RPCs.
- FY23 funds became available on 4/4/23. 9 RPCs because two received EPA grants.
- With FY22 and FY23 funding, \$1.236M encumbered as of 9/30/23. **88 projects on 52 sites.**
- FY24 Funding became available December 2023. 9 RPCs expected to participate.



Equity & Environmental Justice & Healthy Communities



RPCs provided **104** communities with assistance in equity, environmental justice, and healthy communities in FY23.

RPCs work with their Board, committees, and staff to understand and improve equity issues internally and within the communities they serve. This work can include:

- ✓ Creating a Code of Conduct
- ✓ Participating in state conversations and initiatives
- ✓ Hosting workshops, forums, and other events
- ✓ Working closely with municipalities and partners to advance projects that further equitable outcomes



Planning & Zoning



In FY23, RPCs provided **181** municipalities with planning and bylaw assistance.

Maintaining clear and up-to-date plans and bylaws creates a strong, guiding vision for communities. This clear vision ensures smooth permitting at state and local levels.



In a follow-up to its Housing Plan, **Addison County Regional Planning Commission** created a *Guide to Creating Accessory Dwelling Units* for the region. The guide provides a comprehensive guide for homeowners to use to create an accessory dwelling unit, including lots of practical connections to permitting authorities, forms and a financial calculator.



Transportation Planning



RPCs provided **235** municipalities with technical assistance in transportation, including:

✓ TRAFFIC COUNTS

✓ CULVERT INVENTORIES

✓ ROAD EROSION INVENTORIES

✓ A VARIETY OF OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

RPCs help coordinate the **Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI)**, a statewide initiative for public involvement in improvements to Vermont’s transportation system and for the development of region-wide transportation plans.



Rutland Regional Planning Commission continued its ongoing effort to improve safety in our downtowns and village centers throughout the region with temporary demonstrations that lead to grant-funded permanent solutions. A low-cost temporary improvement of a dangerous mid-block crosswalk on Merchants Row in Downtown Rutland used colorful paint, movable delineators, and planters to create a pedestrian crossing island and curb extensions.



Emergency Planning & Response



With technical assistance from RPCs, **212** municipalities were able to mitigate disasters and improve their emergency preparedness in FY23.

RPCs play key roles in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management. Through partnership with Vermont Emergency Management, VTrans, and the Agency of Natural Resources, RPCs assist municipalities by:

✓ PROVIDING STAFF TO THE STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

✓ SUPPORTING LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTORS

✓ ASSISTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANS

✓ UPDATING FLOODPLAIN AND RIVER CORRIDOR BYLAWS AND HAZARD MITIGATION PLANS REQUIRED BY FEMA

✓ ASSISTING MUNICIPALITIES DURING AND AFTER DISASTER EVENTS

✓ ...AND MORE

Energy Planning & Implementation



With assistance from RPCs, **221** communities developed comprehensive energy plans.

With a focus on sustainability and affordability, Vermont communities face significant roadblocks and opportunities in the clean energy transition. RPCs assist communities by helping develop comprehensive local and regional energy plans that integrate land use, transportation, natural resources, and energy project implementation.



Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission hosted two out of a three-part workshop series intended to support member municipalities interested in municipal solar projects. The trainings have resulted in technical assistance for developing specific projects in Marshfield Village & Town, Worcester, Middlesex, Berlin (matching fund opportunities for Northeast Borders application), and more.



Partnerships

RPCs support numerous collaborative efforts.

- RPCs work with RDCs on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy & Economic Development Districts.
- RPCs provided initial start-up and some continuing support for Communication Union Districts.
- RPCs are serving as Clean Water Service Providers in the Lake Champlain basin.
- RPCs also support other collaboratives around public safety, energy, and other issues as needed with our municipalities.
- RPCs are one of the few entities that stay engaged for the months and years it takes to move a project from concept to implementation. Towns rely on us for this continuity.



Northwest Regional Planning Commission continued providing administrative, governance support and project management assistance to the Northwest Vermont Communications Union District (dba **Northwest Fiberworx**). This Unit of Local Government, made of representatives from communities within the region (plus Milton in Chittenden County) was formed in 2020 to support the expansion of broadband services in the region. The goal of Northwest Fiberworx is to deliver reliable, affordable high-speed internet to unserved and underserved residents in the region.



Thank you!

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For more information, visit: **VAPDA.org**