



Regional Planning Commissions Overview

Presented to:

**House Committee on
Commerce and Economic Development**

January 16, 2025

Peter Gregory, Executive Director, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

David Snedeker, Executive Director, Northeastern Vermont Development Association

Tasha Wallis, Executive Director, Lamoille County Planning Commission

Tom Kennedy, Director of Community Development, Mount Ascutney Regional Commission



Outline

1. Introduction

2. Accountability

3. Funding

4. State Policy

5. RPC Programs



Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) provide staff support and technical assistance to towns and the State.



In the absence of county government, RPCs play a critical role in connecting communities with federal and state programs and dollars as well as a forum for towns to discuss and provide services jointly.

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



**TRANSPORTATION
PLANNING**



**LAND USE
PLANNING**



**AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE IN
ALL AREAS**



**WATER
QUALITY**



**HAZARD MITIGATION &
PREPAREDNESS**



HOUSING



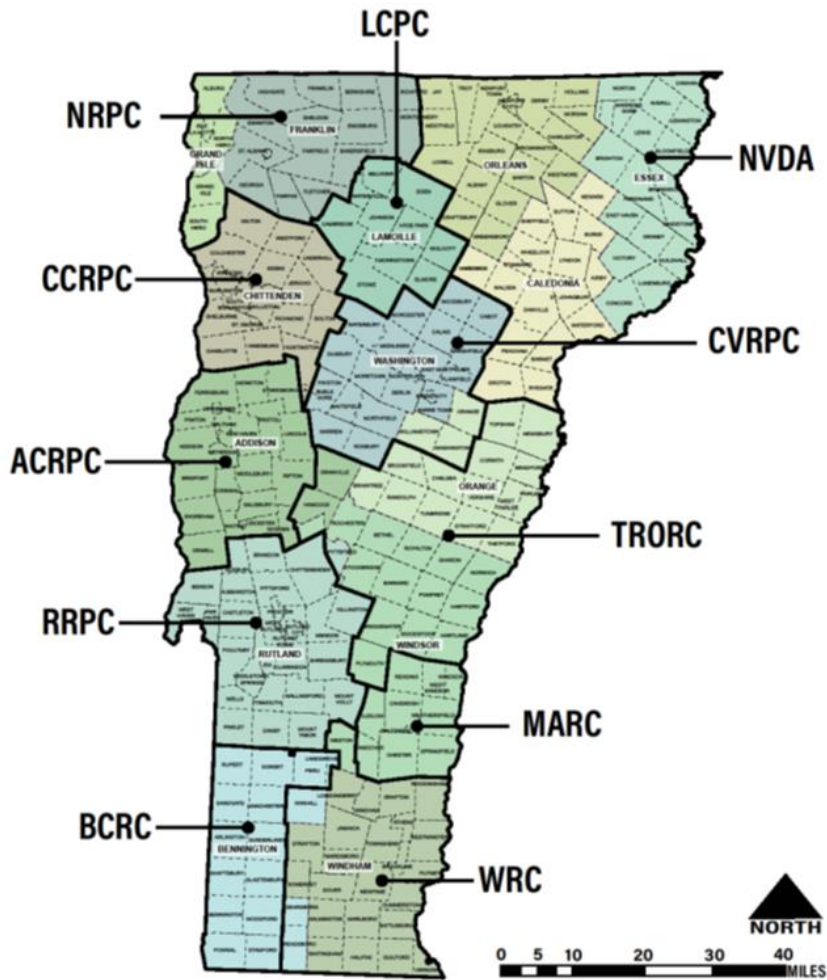
**BROWNFIELD
ASSESSMENT &
REMEDATION**



**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**



**ENERGY
PLANNING**



**STATE OF VERMONT
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS**

Quick Facts / FY24 Highlights



Vermont has **11** RPCs and **135** staff serving all 282 Vermont's towns (237), cities (10), villages (35), plus gores.



In FY24, **113** communities received grant writing assistance from their RPCs, reducing the burden on limited town staff & providing funding for locally needed projects.



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



Governance



Towns appoint representatives to each RPC Board. RPCs work for member towns.



RPC Boards approve budgets and set policy and program priorities, including regional plans.



Executive Committees of each RPC board are responsible for the oversight of the Executive Director.



Each RPC has committees to assist the RPC Board. Typical are Transportation, Permit/Regulatory, Regional Plan, Clean Water, Brownfield, etc.

Funding



RPCs have no general tax revenue. All revenue comes from state and federal grants with limited town dues.

RPCs operate as public sector consulting staff for member towns and state agencies – every hour of work gets billed to specific performance agreements.



MUNICIPALITIES

REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS

GRANT FUNDERS:

ACCD, VTrans, ANR, VEM, AOA, BGS, DPS, VDH, USDA, EDA, EPA, USDOT, NBRC, town dues





State Policy and Implementation

RPCs provide on-the-ground expertise on town and regional issues to the state in policy deliberations and implementation.



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



RPC Directors and senior staff are often asked to serve on state councils and boards and are frequently called upon by state agencies to develop and implement statutorily-mandated programs with our member municipalities.



2024 Housing/Act 250 bill (Act 181) Implementation

1. Interim exemptions are in place. See map.
2. RPCs developed regional plan future land use guidance 12/2024 and provided training with NRB and DHCD.
3. It's critical to align town, regional, and state plans and permitting to support housing and job growth.
4. RPCs are on schedule for all 11 regional plans to be updated by December 2026:



2025 Summer - NVDA
2025 Fall - CVRPC, NRPC
2026 Spring - ACRPC, BCRC, RRPC, WRC, CCRPC,
LCPC
2026 Summer - MARC
2026 Fall - TRORC



Regional Planning

At the regional level, RPCs coordinate town plans with regional plans, and provide key insights for towns through research, studies, and analysis.



This regional support helps towns with minimal staff capacity be more competitive for state and federal funding and improve local decision-making on development, transportation, natural resources, etc.



All 11 RPCs will update their regional plans to comply with Act 181 requirements by the end of 2026.

Planning and Zoning



In FY24, RPCs provided **188** towns 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 and supports housing and job growth.



240 municipalities have municipal plans
207 municipalities have zoning bylaws
37 municipalities only have flood bylaws
17 municipalities have no bylaws



Housing



In FY24, RPCs provided **94** towns with assistance to increase housing.

Some of these efforts were to update zoning to support increased densities in our centers.

Others were to provide guidance to property owners on ADUs and other infill housing.



Rutland RPC produced a Housing Resource Guide combining 50 resources from 15 organizations into a single, accessible document. It helps users with project management, funding, permit compliance, and more by providing toolkits, data, and online resources.

Housing

To produce more housing, more state policy changes are needed:



1. Making more funding/financing available to towns and/or developers for infrastructure.
2. The risk from permit appeals needs to be reduced, especially in Tier 1B Act 250 exemption areas.
3. Review other state permits beyond Act 250 (DEC, SHPO, etc.) to see how they should be modified to support housing & job growth.

Economic and Community Development



126 towns received economic development assistance from their RPCs in FY24, strengthening local economies.

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

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



Working with the small rural Town of Albany and a motivated group of local citizens, **NVDA** assisted the Town to develop their first ever Town Plan and create a Designated Village Center. Then, utilizing VT Tax Credits and NVDA EPA Assessment funds, a long vacant and blighted former gas station was transformed into the new Albany General Store – now a vibrant community hub.



Brownfields



55 towns were able to assess or remediate polluted land with the support of RPCs in FY24.

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



After helping the Town of St. Johnsbury to create its first Neighborhood Designated Area, **NVDA** and the Town are using their EPA Assessment and Cleanup funds to redevelop a former industrial site to create new housing. The Town, NVDA, and a developer of Mass Timber housing will create approximately 30-35 new units on the 8-acre parcel.



Transportation Planning



RPCs provided **211** towns 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)** with VTrans, a statewide initiative for public involvement in improvements to Vermont's transportation system and for the development of region-wide transportation plans.



Northwest RPC and the Northwest VT Rail Trail Council launched a new interactive map for the Missisquoi and the Lamoille Valley Rail Trails. The interactive map features Trail Friendly Businesses in towns that border the trails, and amenities along the trail. To check out the new interactive map, visit <https://www.mvrailtrail.org/>



Clean Water



204 towns took steps to improve their water quality in FY24 with assistance from RPCs.

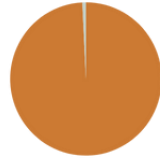
Many of these improvements resulted from RPC assistance in the *Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid Program* through the Vermont Agency of Transportation.



ACRPC used DEC funding for Vermont Family Forests to reduce erosion control from forest roads at the Bristol Town Forest on Seth Hill in Lincoln. The project led to a reduction of 14.9kg/year of Phosphorus entering our waterways.



Emergency Planning and Response



With technical assistance from RPCs, **260** towns were able to improve their emergency preparedness and work to mitigate damage from disasters.

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 towns 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



Mapping



180 towns received mapping services from Regional Planning Commissions in FY24, assisting in a variety of municipal operations and plans.

Mapping and data analysis is a key component to planning, enabling a deeper understanding of the various dimensions that RPCs assist towns in. Chances are the maps you see in a town office or road foreman's truck were created by an RPC.



RPCs provide GIS services to towns, state agencies, private entities and non-profits to support their projects, and ensure development and plans are driven by accurate data and sound analysis.



Energy Planning & Implementation



With assistance from RPCs, **228** towns developed comprehensive energy plans.

With a focus on sustainability and affordability, Vermont towns 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.



In coordination with the Department of Buildings and General Services, the RPCs have supported the **Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP)**, which has provided energy capacity building mini grants to **176** municipalities, free energy assessments on over **600** municipal buildings, and awarded **\$35.9 million in implementation funding to 126 municipalities.**



Partnerships

RPCs support numerous collaborative efforts.

- RPCs work with Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy & Economic Development Districts.
- RPCs provided initial start-up and some continuing support for Communication Union Districts to provide broadband statewide.
- RPCs are serving as Clean Water Service Providers in the Lake Champlain basin to help achieve clean water goals.
- 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 and staff support.



TRORC, in partnership with the AOA, VLCT and all 11 RPCs, is managing the **Municipal Technical Assistance Program** to provide staff capacity to the most rural towns to ensure they have access to all state and federal grant opportunities for housing, disaster response and infrastructure that our larger, fully staffed towns already possess. This targeted support has been instrumental in securing funding that would not have otherwise been available to these towns.



Thank you!

Peter Gregory: pgregory@trorc.org | (802) 457-3188
Dave Snedeker: dsnedeker@nvda.net | (802) 748-8303
Tasha Wallis: tasha@lpcvt.org | (802) 851-6346
Tom Kennedy: tkennedy@marcvvt.org | (802) 461-6422



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