

Bennington County Regional Commission

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Friday – December 15, 2023
8:30 AM
Meeting Conducted via ZOOM**

In attendance: Nick Zaiac, Shelia Kearns, James Salerno, Dimitri Garder, John Lavecchia Jr., Janet Hurley (staff), Bill Colvin (staff)

The meeting was called to order at 8:31am.

Garder moved approval of the Minutes of the October 27, 2023 Executive Committee meeting. Seconded by Lavecchia. Approved.

Audit Questions

Colvin reviewed the changes between the draft audit received and reviewed by the Executive Committee at its October meeting and the final version. Garder asked Colvin to comment on the audit process under RHR Smith, a change from the long time auditing firm. Colvin explained there was significant prep work ahead of the audit and that the audit process on the ground and follow up had gone very smoothly.

Garder moved and Salerno seconded acceptance of the FY23 Audit. Approved.

BCRC Updated Procurement Policy

Colvin noted the BCRC Procurement Policy had not been updated since 2018 and some of BCRC's funding agencies had requested an updated policy. He reviewed proposed changes between the existing procurement policy and the newly proposed one.

Zaiac moved approval of the new BCRC Procurement Policy as presented in the meeting packet to be effective as of December 15, 2023. Kearns seconded. Approved.

Updated BCRC Medical Insurance Coverage Policy – Domestic Partners

As discussed at the October BCRC Executive Committee meeting, we would like to update the BCRC Medical Insurance Coverage Policy to include qualified domestic partners and their children. Colvin reviewed the proposed changes to the BCRC Group Medical Insurance Coverage to provide coverage for

qualified domestic partners and their children to include medical, dental and vision coverage. He also reviewed the proposed application form that would be required to be completed by the BCRC employee and the domestic partner.

Lavecchia move approval of the new BCRC policy on Medical Insurance Coverage, to now include coverage for qualified domestic partners and their children, effective December 15, 2023. Salerno seconded. Approved

Program Updates: Q&A Time with Bill & Janet

Community and Economic Development

- Putnam Phase 2: Planning for the next phase of the Putnam Block Redevelopment is picking up steam as M&S Development has completed an initial feasibility study and a draft investor pitch deck. Investors and other funding will be sought through the fall and winter with the goal of lining up all financing by summer 2023. BCRC continues to support the effort and had a pre-development services agreement for FY23 and is working on a new one for FY24.
- Pownal Commercial Siting Criteria Study: The Town of Pownal asked BCRC to work with the town to develop criteria to identify potential sites that could be used to increase economic development activity within the community. The project will consider four economic development scenarios – mixed-use, residential, commercial and industrial- and establish criteria consistent with local, regional and state planning goals and documents to identify locations with the highest potential for each scenario. If necessary, draft language to modify the town plan or zoning bylaws to meet the desired outcomes will be suggested. BCRC staff met with the Pownal Select Board in November to review the final report which was very well received.
- Building Communities Grants: BCRC staff connected with several businesses throughout FY23 Q4 and FY24 Q1 to discuss the suite of grants in the Building Communities Grants umbrella. Staff worked with two applicants this year: a woman/veteran-owned nonprofit providing service dog training at no cost to first responders, and a woman-owned business expanding from tailoring and alterations into an underserved embroidery market. Both applications were funded. The tailoring business received the full request amount. The dog training business received \$15,000 of the requested \$25,000.
- Energizer Plant Redevelopment: The BCRC has been actively engaged in multiple ways in efforts to redevelop the 300,000SF former Energizer manufacturing facility in downtown Bennington. The BCRC has supported the Town of Bennington in its communications with V/T Commercial and the

Energizer Corporation regarding the possibility of encouraging Energizer to proactively finalize remediation at the property to facilitate a future transfer.

A second effort involves an international start-up with interest in the facility. The company would establish its manufacturing operation in a portion of the property and work with a partner to develop housing for employees, and possibly others, in other areas of the property. The BCRC has participated with ACCD and the company in two virtual meetings, has facilitated a VEGI pre-application meeting with the company and VEPC and has met US-based representatives of the company on a tour of the property.

Planning Programs

- Bylaw Modernization Grant (BMG) Program: Janet is working with the 9 funded member municipalities to wrap-up work under this FY22 grant. Revisions are focused on provisions that will remove housing barriers.

With FY24 applications due on November 1, 2023, Janet worked with Manchester Village to apply for support of more comprehensive changes to its bylaws.

- Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) Program: Arlington has adopted a revised land use and development ordinance, and grant close-out is complete.

BCRC is working with the Bennington Planning Commission under a FY23 MPG to develop and implement a public engagement effort focused on DEI for phase one of a town plan update. Public engagement for the town plan began in December and will continue through the winter months. The BCRC assisted the town in applying for FY24 MPG funding for phase two of the town plan work (drafting the plan based on the public engagement effort).

In Pownal under a FY23 MPG, BCRC is coordinating the public outreach and report development for a town green or park adjacent to the new town hall.

Manchester secured a FY23 MPG to fund work on a new town plan, but the town asked to postpone the effort for another year. BCRC engaged the town about whether it will be prepared to pursue the project in 2025 but the town did not respond affirmatively before the November 1 deadline.

- Designation Program: BCRC helped coordinate Sunderland's minor town plan amendment so that a village center designation can be pursued. BCRC finalized mapping and other documentation required for the application and will assist in submitting the application once the selectboard has adopted the plan amendment (as soon as December 18th). The proposed area for Village Center designation is along Route 7A near the access road to Equinox Mountain.

- Other municipal Planning Efforts: Under an hourly contractual basis BCRC helped Manchester to prepare zoning revisions. Public hearings on the draft revisions have been conducted. The selectboard rejected a number of the proposed changes, so the Planning Commission will hold a new hearing on a slimmed down version of the proposed changes.
- Future Land Use Map. BCRC has participated in drafting a statewide future land use map and a legislative report on the effort due from VAPDA by December 31 as required by the HOME Act.
- Municipal Act 250 Delegation. The HOME Act also tasked VAPDA with proposing a process for delegation of Act 250 review to municipalities with strict land use regulations and high staff capacity. VAPDA has proposed local permit review in lieu of Act 250 review and a process for determining how a municipality can apply for such jurisdiction. This will likely only apply to larger municipalities in and around Chittenden County. BCRC held a public meeting on the proposed process on December 14th.
- Energy: The BCRC has been coordinating work statewide, with the Public Service Department, on updates to energy data, electricity generation modeling, and local and regional energy plan guidelines. Callie Fishburn serves on a team of three energy planners statewide to coordinate directly with BGS, on behalf of all the RPCs, on the roll out of the MERP program. Applications are live for the \$4,000 mini-grants for public education efforts and regional municipalities have been applying for funding.

Spurred by the public concern over the proposed 20MW solar project, the Shaftsbury Planning Commission engaged the BCRC to help develop an Act-174 compliant enhanced energy plan. BCRC completed a draft plan. The Planning Commission continues its work on some policy formulations to add to the draft plan.

- Environmental Program: BCRC applied to the EPA for a \$500,000 Brownfields assessment grant but was not funded. We will reapply for this grant in November 2023. We have received an additional \$100,000 from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development State Brownfields funding and will request additional funds when that is committed.

We are also continuing to assist towns and villages with the Municipal Roads General Permit requirements. Thirteen of our municipalities are participating in the FY23 Grants-In-Aid Program which addresses those road segments which currently do not meet the MRGP standards.

We received a Flood Resiliency Community Fund grant to hire NorthStar Hydro to study sediment loading in Bourn Brook and Lye Brook in Manchester. A final presentation of our alternatives was given before the Manchester selectboard early in December.

Other stormwater management and flood resiliency projects include several Better Road Grants and a Vermont Clean Water Fund grant to review and update five adopted municipal Stormwater Master Plans. One high priority project from each municipality has been selected to move towards grant applications for their implementation.

There being no other business the meeting adjourned at 9:08am.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Colvin
Director