



Bennington County Regional Commission

# News and Notes

July 2021

## July BCRC Meeting: Discussion of DEI Issues with Vermont's Director of Racial Equity

**Glastenbury Bylaw Hearing, Too!**

**Thursday - July 15 at 5:30 PM (Location and Zoom Link Below)**

The BCRC recognizes that decisions made at the local and regional level can, and do, have significant impacts which may advantage or disadvantage people from different backgrounds. The work we do in land use, transportation, community and economic development, and other fields must consider the interests and needs of a diverse population. We are excited to dedicate much of our July meeting agenda to a discussion of these issues of *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* with Xusana Davis, who serves as the State of Vermont's Executive Director of Racial Equity. She was appointed to the position in June 2019 by Governor Phil Scott. Xusana works with state agencies to identify and address systemic racial disparities and support the state's efforts to expand and diversify Vermont's population. She relies on data to inform this work, and on the State Strategic Plan to guide it.



Xusana Davis, Vermont's  
Director of Racial Equity

Prior to joining the State of Vermont, Xusana served as Director of Health & Housing Strategic Initiatives at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and as the Director of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus of the New York City Council. She holds a Juris Doctor with a concentration in International Human Rights Law from New York Law School, where she also directed a civil liberties education program for low-income and minority youth. Xusana is a first-generation U.S.-born Latina and has always been passionate about promoting open access to government for all people, regardless of their background or place of origin.

The BCRC also will be considering a series of amendments to the Glastenbury Zoning Bylaws at the meeting. According to the Vermont Planning and Development Act, regional planning commissions are responsible for holding hearings and adopting land use regulations for unorganized towns like Glastenbury. A working group has drafted the amendments and filed a report (available [here](#)).

We expect (hope) that this will be our last meeting held primarily via ZOOM, although you can attend the meeting at the BCRC offices at 210 South Street in Bennington. Login information:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81517296927>

Phone: 1 929 205 6099

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Meeting ID: 815 1729 6927

## Tactical Basin Plan for Regional Watersheds Released

The 2021 Draft Batten Kill, Hoosic, and Walloomsac (Basin 1) Tactical Basin Plan is available for public comment through July 22. Development of the Tactical Basin Plan was coordinated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources .

The Basin 1 Plan encompasses portions of 16 towns in Southwestern Vermont: Arlington, Bennington, Dorset, Glastenbury, Manchester, Peru, Pownal, Readsboro, Rupert, Sandgate, Shaftsbury, Stamford, Stratton, Sunderland, Winhall, and Woodford. The Plan offers an assessment of the condition of rivers, lakes, and wetlands within the Batten Kill, Hoosic River, and Walloomsac River watersheds. It outlines 39 strategies to improve water quality, including methods to decrease runoff from farms and roads, protect and restore water bodies, and limit overflows from wastewater treatment facilities. The Plan also provides useful tips for landowners, watershed organizations, and towns interested in receiving funding and technical assistance to help protect and restore water resources.

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation partnered with the Bennington County Regional Commission, the Bennington County Natural Resource Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, the Batten Kill Conservancy, the Hoosic River Watershed Association, and the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance to draft the plan. A final public meeting on the Plan is scheduled for:

July 8 from 3:00-4:30 p. Virtual meeting, . ([Click here to join the meeting](#))

In-person option at the Arlington Town Hall located at 3828 VT Route 7A, Arlington, VT

Copies of the draft plan are at [Basin 1 Tactical Plan](#). To request a hard copy, please contact Angie Allen at [Angie.Allen@vermont.gov](mailto:Angie.Allen@vermont.gov) or phone: (802) 490-9081. Comments may be submitted by email ([ANR.Basin1Comments@vermont.gov](mailto:ANR.Basin1Comments@vermont.gov)) or hard copy to: Angie Allen, Basin 1 Comments, 430 Asa Bloomer State Office Bldg., 88 Merchants Row, Rutland, VT, 05701-5903. by July 22.

To learn more, visit the [Basin 1 tactical basin planning website](#).



Benedict Hollow Bridge over the Batten Kill in Arlington

## Riparian Buffer Plantings and Floodplain Restoration

The BCRC has just completed a second cooperative agreement with the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance (BKWA) to provide public outreach and project development services. These services focus on riparian habitat restoration including invasive species management and riparian buffer plantings of trees and shrubs. Priority sites have been defined as those areas with significant invasive species and areas with exposed and eroding riverbanks.

Last year the BCRC's environmental program manager, Jim Henderson, worked with volunteers from BKWA, Trout Unlimited (TU), and Burr and Burton Academy (BBA) to plant over 250 sycamore, silver maple, sugar maple, white oak, cottonwood, hackbush, red osier dogwoods, and apple trees on six properties along the Batten Kill in Arlington. In September 32 blight resistant American elms, provided by The Nature Conservancy, were planted along the Batten Kill at The Red Mill Fishing Access, The Green River Confluence Fishing Access, and The Hill Farm Fishing Access sites with BBA and TU volunteer support.



Burr and Burton Academy students planting trees on the Green River in Sandgate.

Henderson also has worked with BKWA, TU, the Bennington County Conservation District (BCCD), and other stakeholders to survey and assess a landslide adjacent to the Green River near the Sandgate Town Office. This information provided the background for a Vermont Clean Water Design and Implementation Grant application as well as a grant to implement the "Batten Kill Watershed Community Connection" by engaging people of all ages in planting trees, removing invasive species, and cleaning trash along the rivers.

BCCD Director Katy Crumley and Henderson worked with Jaiel Pulskamp of the 350 Vermont Rewild Campaign, an environmental justice organization, to acquire 250 floodplain suitable saplings from the Cold Stream Conservation Nursery and The Interval Conservation Nursery to be planted at riparian buffer and floodplain restoration projects. Volunteers from TU and BBA planted 105 of these trees and shrubs on five properties along the Green River in Arlington and Sandgate. and another 100 were planted along the Batten Kill, Walloomsac River, Hoosic River, and the shore of Lake Paran. Remaining trees and shrubs are available for fall plantings. Arrangements are currently being made with 350 Vermont to place another plant order in the spring of 2022. Please contact Jim Henderson ([jhenderson@bcrcvt.org](mailto:jhenderson@bcrcvt.org)) if you are interested in having trees planted on your property.



## DRAFT Visitor Information Center Study

The Vermont Visitor Information Center Study was prepared on behalf of the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS), and the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) to evaluate the current system of

Visitor Information Centers and develop recommendations for strategic future actions and investments that meet programmatic objectives and requirements in a fiscally sustainable manner.

This report, which summarizes the findings of the system assessment, stakeholder and study group input, and system recommendations, is organized into the following sections:

- **Section 1: Current State:** This section provides a detailed overview of the Vermont Information Centers Division (VICD) program including a history of the system, management structure and agency responsibilities, a summary of state and federal requirements, an inventory and assessment of the existing VICD system, an overview of historic funding and expenditures, a summary of visitation and utilization trends, an overview of the regression models developed for the financial analysis, and description of the Study stakeholder involvement.
- **Section 2: Scenario Planning & Alternatives Evaluation:** This section summarizes the scenario planning and alternatives evaluation process conducted to develop the Study recommendations, including descriptions of each of the scenarios and alternatives investigated, refinements made to alternatives based on feedback and research, and an overview of potential alternative delivery models for the system.
- **Section 3: Recommendations:** This section presents the final set of recommendations for the VICD network, including the alternatives recommended to be carried forward based on policy-maker decisions, systemwide recommendations based on study findings, and considerations in modernizing the system for future travelers.

You can review the full draft report at: [Visitor Information Center Study](#). Contact BCRC Transportation Program Manager, [Mark Anders](#), with any comments or suggestions to be passed along to VTrans.

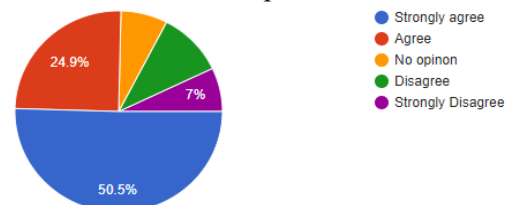
## Final Results: Work from Home Survey of Vermonters

The Center for Research on Vermont recently released the results of its telecommuting survey that was distributed to about 10,000 people from lists that the Center maintains, and to Regional Planning Commissions, Regional Development Corporations, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, state government staff, UVM faculty and staff, and through public media and stakeholder organizations. The survey was open to all via a web platform and was not a representative sampling of the underlying population. It represents a snapshot of a certain slice of the Vermont population. The full survey can be reviewed at:

[Telecommuting Survey](#)

The clear indication is that a strong preference for work from home options and accommodations developed during the pandemic and will persist into the future. The implications of those findings in future transportation, land use, and energy work will need further study.

Survey Question: I expect to work from home more often than I did prior to March 2020:





## Southern Vermont Zone CEDS

### 2021 Vital Projects Announced

The Bennington County Regional Commission and the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) are pleased to announce that ten projects submitted as part of the Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy have received Vital Project designation. The Southern Vermont CEDS is a federally approved action plan for growing the Southern Vermont Zone's regional economy and represents a broadened continuation of the original Windham County S.M.A.R.T. CEDS that was completed in 2013. Each year, the CEDS includes new and updated project submissions from businesses and organizations that highlight several activities strengthening the region at a range of scales.

Projects were selected by a CEDS Project Review Committee comprising members of the public and business community and organized by the staff at BDCC and the BCRC. The committee reviewed 66 projects from municipalities, businesses, and non-profit organizations across the two-county region, and offers its thanks to all the organizations that submitted projects and its congratulations to those receiving Vital Project designation.

According to Bill Colvin, Assistant Director of the BCRC and Director of the Bennington County Industrial Corporation, "this year's projects show that Southern Vermont's public and private sectors see strong ties between their work and our region's economic success, whether addressing aging infrastructure, early childhood education needs, real estate development opportunities, cultural offerings, or public spaces for the public good." Adam Grinold, Executive Director of the BDCC, added "the majority of the Vital Project designations were awarded to new projects, an indicator of how swiftly organizations in our region have pivoted to address new challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic."

Among the projects selected from the Bennington Region this year:

- ⇒ Town of Bennington: Bennington Recreation Center Head Start/Early Head Start Addition
- ⇒ Food Connects: Developing New Markets and Infrastructure to Support Vermont Farms and Food Producers
- ⇒ Paran Recreations: Intersecting Recreation, Environmental Education and Food Security at Lake Paran
- ⇒ Dorset Theater Festival: Outdoor Season at the Southern Vermont Arts Center
- ⇒ Southern Vermont Communications Union District : Broadband to under-served areas in the region

For more information on the CEDS and the selected projects, go to:

[Southern Vermont CEDS Vital Projects](#)



*The following article was written for the International Economic Development Council by Jonathan Cooper, BCRC's Community and Economic Development Specialist and a subcommittee chair of IEDS's higher education advisory committee.*

## **Shuttered Colleges: Preserving Workforce Pipelines and Repurposing Campuses**

Five years before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Moody's Investors Service noticed worrisome trends for America's smaller nonprofit colleges: a shrinking pool of applicants, falling tuition revenue, rising operating expenses, and emerging student preferences for larger institutions. In that 2015 report, Moody's forecast a threefold rise in annual smaller college closures before the end of the decade. The prediction wasn't far off: since 2016, more than 60 such institutions have closed, merged, or announced firm dates for closure, nearly 2.5 times the baseline rate. While approximately one-third of these shutdowns have taken place in the Northeastern United States, smaller colleges have closed in a total of 28 states, with three or more closures in Alabama, California, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, and Vermont. Given the trends and distribution, it is time for economic developers to give the issue its due consideration.

This article describes the experience in Bennington, Vt., where Southern Vermont College announced its sudden closure in spring of 2019. There were two parts to addressing the closure: preserving programmatic pipelines for a major employer, and finding ways to repurpose the campus. This will be of particular interest to professionals in rural areas that host a smaller public or private college, or wherever smaller colleges with a distinct admissions niche are operating (colleges for music, women, non-traditional students, non-traditional degrees, etc.), due to their greater risk of closure.

### **One community's experience**

On March 4, 2019, Bennington residents learned that Southern Vermont College would close permanently at the end of the academic year. This meant the loss of some 350 students and 100 jobs in a small town of 15,000 residents, where the exodus of youth and work that plagues much of rural America has been the norm for nearly 20 years. It also meant an uncertain future for the 371-acre campus on the former mountainside summer estate of one of the town's most successful industrialists. In Bennington, the suddenness of the announcement left both the college community and the broader town reeling. Attention at the school was focused on maintaining staffing and payroll, course completion for seniors, and securing teach-out agreements for all other students. Attention in the town was on rescue efforts that were long on passion and short on capacity. Through the economic development lens, there were two imperatives:

- Replace the shuttered college's most important workforce pipeline to a major employer, and
- Get a handle on feasible uses of the campus, and help direct public dialogue around it.

Priority one was assisting the region's largest employer, Southwestern Vermont Health Care, in finding a new educational partner for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree program designed for incumbent employees and others with an associates degree. The program was saved by creating a successor program through a state college that operates on a satellite campus at a clinical office space in downtown Bennington.

This "priority pipeline" approach had gathered support from higher up the food chain. Given the critical shortage of nurses in rural hospitals, officials throughout the state and regulators with the educational accrediting body understood the need for quick action and necessary approvals. How quick? Two months after Southern Vermont College announced its closure, Castleton University announced an expansion to ensure the program's continuation in Bennington. One important point here: as with many smaller colleges on the brink, accreditation challenges precipitated the college's closure, and the reasons were financial, not academic. This is significant for conversations about

finding a new educational home for a pipeline and can help prospective institutions see the potential.

### **The campus' next act**

In rural areas, closed college campuses attract a great deal of speculation around next acts, often from non-locals. In Bennington, ideas included a village-themed resort, an intentional co-dwelling residential community, a religious community, and an alternative secondary school. (Sometimes, as is the case with the former Marlboro College just to the east of Bennington, the attention can become an unwelcome distraction.) Lukewarm real estate interest meant the campus went to auction in December 2020. The winning \$4.65 million bid came from none other than Southwestern Vermont Health Care, which promptly turned to the Bennington County Regional Commission, the county's planning and economic development organization, to assist with site feasibility work and redevelopment initiatives. Given the relief the community felt with this development, a fundraising initiative that launched in early 2021 raised \$603,000 from residents around the region, approximately 20 percent above the stated goal. With site control now established and community support in hand, other details could be worked out: the town will maintain the athletic fields in exchange for public use for the coming year, and a public survey gathered nearly 1,000 responses with detailed ideas for site use. Redevelopment will rely on the community's proven ability to work together and promote ideal anchor tenant scenarios that the health system's involvement can provide to developers.

### **Get to know your local college**

This article detailed how an economic development team responded to an unexpected small college closure announcement. The strategy focused on areas of greatest leverage, driven entirely by context. In a different scenario—if there had been a dedicated and deep-pocketed alumni base, for example—working with a "save the college" initiative might have made the most sense. Economic developers know their backyards well, but one of the key differences between a college and nearly any other type of private employer is that you can access a good deal more information about your college. Here are a few ideas for establishing a baseline for strategy development:

- Familiarize yourself with the numbers. Set a lookback period of 5-8 years and look for institutional details around endowment, revenues, enrollments, degrees conferred, and debt-to-earnings ratios from a variety of sources, starting with the college's Common Data Set and annual report. Factor in areas of clear specialization, degree-related or not: a college with a leading visual arts degree program has an important competitive advantage in recruiting students, as does a college with a leading dressage/equestrian athletics program.
- Spend time on the campus when you are able. Prior to the pandemic, smaller colleges were finding creative ways to participate in civic life and welcome the public onto campus. You'll get a read on how strong that town-gown bond is, and a good feel for natural assets, structural assets, and development potential. Bonus: a walk or drive around campus parking lots can reveal a lot about out-of-state recruiting power via license plates, and, where you see vehicles belonging to local businesses, its importance as a purchaser of local services .
- Follow up on connections to your economy. Ask vendors how often they're on campus. Keep abreast of a major employer's satisfaction with pipelines. If a transportation authority provides bus service to and through the campus, inquire about ridership data.
- Consult with local and regional planning officials. Colleges are rarely zoned for industry or other commercial development, are sometimes subject to easements that ensure public access to pathways, trails, or other features, and frequently contain buildings with historic preservation designations. Understanding those unique obligations or encumbrances now can help your organization anticipate any limitations on subsequent uses, and help accelerate your thinking around potential conversions.

## Events and Opportunities....

**Route 9 Corridor Management Plan Public Meeting:** The Route 9 Corridor Management Plan is now available [online on the website](#). The StoryMap has the most up to date information and summaries. There will be an online meeting to give an overview of the Plan, with a time for Q&A on:

**Tuesday, July 13th at 4pm.** [Click here to join Microsoft Teams Meeting online](#). Alternatively you can phone +1 802-828-7667 (Montpelier Toll) Conference ID: 726 284 919# and then download the powerpoint from the [project website](#).

If you cannot attend on the day, a recording of the meeting will be available online after the meeting.

**Energizer Reuse Plan Public Meeting : Wednesday, July 21, 2021 – 6:00pm-7:30pm**

**Via Zoom + Meeting Details:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83594181724?pwd=MkdmcW1iQU NNNDM3YW FtV0g1bVFnZz09>

Meeting ID: 835 9418 1724; Passcode: 865019

Phone Info: 1 929 205 6099; Meeting ID: 835 9418 1724; Passcode: 865019

This meeting will focus on the BCRC project examining potential for reuse of the Energizer complex in Bennington. Topics covered will include: project overview, market and economic data, site reuse survey findings, and Q&A/open discussion.

**Building a Resilient Path to Vermont’s Lower Carbon Future. 12- 2 pm on July 27.**

[Register here](#)

Presented by The Vermont Clean Cities Coalition and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets. The workshop will: show current fuels, applications and emissions in Vermont; demonstrate low-carbon options and energy transitions; and help construct resilient pathways that strengthen our economy, and fast track decarbonization.

The **Building Communities Grants Program** has been funded for FY2022 and with increased funding! This program, administered by BGS, includes the following:

- 1) \$300,000.00 – Recreational Facilities Grant Program
- 2) \$300,000.00 – Regional Economic Development Grant Program
- 3) \$150,000.00 – Human Services Facilities Grant Program
- 4) \$150,000.00 – Educational Facilities Grant Program

The grants are for construction and capital improvements to support and strengthen Vermont towns and regions. Descriptions and application criteria for all four of these grant programs are available on the Department of Buildings and General Services website:

<http://www.bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.

Applicants including municipalities, nonprofit agencies, and regional economic development organizations, are all encouraged to apply for these opportunities to fund construction, infrastructure support, and needed projects.

Although the award of the grants is competitive, the application process has been designed to be simple and straightforward. Grant applicants will be awarded funding as determined by a special committee comprised of private citizens, legislative branch members, and executive branch administrative staff appointed by the Governor. Grants will be awarded in the fall of 2021.

For more information on these and other grant opportunities, visit the following address:

<http://www.bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.



The **2022 Municipal Park-and-Ride Grant Program** has been funded with \$100,000.00. These facilities will assist in the effort of reducing the number of single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) on the roadway, which in turn helps to reduce vehicle pollutants and traffic congestion. To be eligible for this grant, the proposed facility must be located on Municipal, State, or leased property on or near a State Highway, available to commuters on a daily basis year-round, provide parking for a minimum of ten vehicles, and will be owned and maintained by the local municipality. For more information and to apply, go to: <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/parkandrides>.

**Climate Catalysts Innovation Fund Grant Program.** The Vermont Council on Rural Development, in collaboration with the Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity (VLITE) and Vermont State Employees Credit Union (VSECU) invites applications for small grants to support local innovators developing solutions that move Vermont closer to its climate and energy goals. The fund is initially capitalized with \$20,000 from VLITE and VSECU and will be administered by VCRD. The objective of the fund is to support innovative local projects for which a small grant could have a meaningful impact. Grants: Anywhere from 4 - 10 awards ranging from \$500 - \$4,000. Funds can be awarded to a municipality, school, non-profit organization or business. A short grant application can be found at: <https://forms.gle/ghoDJpMxDkdEXDVs8>. The deadline to apply for this grant is **July 22**.

**Learning Management System (LMS) for emergency management trainings** through Vermont Emergency Management (VEM): To access the LMS, register by visiting the VEM website at <https://vem.vermont.gov/training/trainingprogram/lms>. Click the link for the Registration Page and fill out the form. From there you will receive an email when your account is approved – within 2-3 business days – then you will be able to access the LMS. If you already have an account, you can sign in at: <https://vermont.csod.com/client/vermont/default.aspx>. The system can be challenging to navigate for first time users, so if you have any questions or have difficulty finding courses, please reach out to Allison Strohl at [astrohl@bcrcvt.org](mailto:astrohl@bcrcvt.org). For registration issues, email [DPS.EMHSTraining@vermont.gov](mailto:DPS.EMHSTraining@vermont.gov) for further assistance.

**American Rescue Plan information for Municipal Officials from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns:** [American Rescue Plan Act | Vermont League of Cities and Towns \(vlct.org\)](#). This information also can be accessed through BCRC's website: [BCRC - Home \(bcrcvt.org\)](#). Contact [Callie Fishburn](#) or [Allison Strohl](#) at the BCRC for more information.

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