



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

July 2022

July BCRC Meeting Lake Paran Programming and Regional Broadband Internet Deployment

Thursday, July 21 at 5:30 PM

Lake Paran Pavilion in North Bennington

[\(DIRECTIONS\)](#)

This meeting will have picnic-style food prepared on the grill by our own Jim Henderson and Scott Grimm-Lyon. No remote meeting option is available.

After the picnic, join us for presentations from staff at Lake Paran Recreation, the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB), and Consolidated Communications (CCI). Lake Paran Recreation is a local nonprofit organization that offers healthy, educational, outdoor fun throughout all four seasons. They provide year-round environmental programming, summer camps, and other seasonal activities such as swimming, boating, fishing, and ice skating. VCBB coordinates the deployment of broadband throughout the state, by developing policies and programs to meet the State's goal of achieving universal, high-quality, affordable broadband in Vermont. CCI owns and operates the largest fiber network in Northern New England and is actively deploying fiber across the state. CCI will discuss their partnership with the Southern Vermont Communications Union District (SoVT CUD) and their plans to expand access to high quality internet in the region.



Lake Paran in North Bennington

Expanding access to high-quality broadband is an important priority for the State of Vermont. In 2021, the legislature passed Act 71 to “coordinate, facilitate support, and accelerate the development and implementation of universal community broadband solutions.” The Act established the Vermont Community Broadband Board and the Broadband Construction Grant Program, for which \$141 million is available.

No need to RSVP. Please come with an appetite and a friend!

Vermont Department of Economic Development Visits Bennington Region

On Thursday, June 2nd, BCRC Executive Director Jim Sullivan, Assistant Director Bill Colvin, and Community & Economic Development Specialist Jonathan Cooper hosted representatives of the Vermont Department of Economic Development (DED) on their first regional visit since before the Covid-19 pandemic. Making the trip to Bennington from Montpelier were DED Commissioner Joan Goldstein, Director of International Trade and Recruitment Tim Tierney, and Abbie Sherman, Director of the Vermont Economic Progress Council.

It was a full day of activity including visits to Southwestern Vermont Health Care, The Arlington Common, Mack Molding, and a downtown Bennington walkabout to tour the Putnam Block, Village Garage Distillery, and other exciting new developments.

Not surprisingly, the primary areas of discussion were the challenges presented by the lack of a readily available workforce and a shortage of housing at all price points. The BCRC was pleased for the opportunity to reengage with the DED in person and to foster even stronger ties between our regional employers and the Department.



BCRC Transportation Planner Mark Anders wins 2022 VT Walk/Bike Professional Award

Transportation planner, Mark Anders, was presented with the professional award in April 2022 at the Annual Vermont Walk/Bike Summit in Middlebury.

Mark was recognized for his role in the Orchard Village—Willowbrook Multi-Use Path project that connects two residential communities with Molly Stark Elementary School and the planned Bennington Bike Path to downtown Bennington. Congratulations, Mark! Read more about the project [here](#).



Mark Presenting at the Vermont Walk/Bike Summit



Completed Orchard Village-Willowbrook Path

Invasive Worms in Bennington County!



Snake Worms— Snake worms are earthworms in a group called pheretimoids. The three species currently of concern in the north-eastern US are *Amyntas agrestis*, *Amyntas tokioensis*, and *Metaphire hilgendorfi*. Snake Worms were introduced with plant material from Japan and Korea. When these worms invade forests they modify the forest floor by consuming the organic material. Their activity suppresses the understory, including saplings. They reduce plant biodiversity and also have negative effects on

salamanders and ground nesting birds. The effects on the sustainability of forest stands are currently difficult to assess because the regeneration in invaded forests will take several decades to play out. They are in all states throughout the North East. Although they have only been recorded by scientists for a few sites, gardeners and landscapers are becoming more aware and frequently find them in gardens and parks. They love any kind of organic matter and spread through horticultural materials (plants, mulches and composts). Sitings can be reported to Professor Josef Görres at jgorres@uvm.edu.

Hammerhead Worms— Another type of invasive worm, hammerhead worms have recently been found in Bennington County. They are venomous, so do not touch (use gloves to handle if necessary). The worms regenerate from fragments if they break into parts so it's recommended to dissolve them in vinegar. Sitings can be reported to the [VT Agency of Natural Resources](#).



Legislative Outcomes Impacting Community Planning

The 2021-2022 Vermont legislative biennium, which some have referred to as the Covid biennium, wrapped up on May 12, 2022. Due to the large amount of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding in the state and the healthy balance of property transfer tax revenues connected to the COVID pandemic, the state budget is a record-breaking \$8.3 billion dollars, and includes investment in climate change mitigation (\$224M), workforce and economic development (\$165M), sewer and water infrastructure (\$104M), broadband buildout (\$96M), and housing (\$89M). Funding for Regional Planning Commissions and the annual Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) program increased by \$1.6M and \$400,000, respectively. The funding cap for the Downtown and Village Center tax credit program to support redevelopment in historic centers increased to \$4.2M for two years.

Several bills made policy changes to boost housing development. The Neighborhood Development Area program, which is an add-on to designated downtowns or village centers, has been modified to no longer require municipal sewer infrastructure, to be eligible for tax credit benefits, and to allow inclusion of flood hazard areas and river corridor areas outside of the floodway. The definition of priority housing projects that exempt affordable housing developments from Act 250 review increased the number of allowed dwelling units from 24 to 49.

Enforcement authority for rental housing code compliance was centralized under the Vermont Division of Fire and Safety. Housing funds are allocated to support first-generation homebuyers, to improve existing mobile home parks, and to incentivize [missing middle housing](#) and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) development.

In their recently-released summary reports, [DHCD](#) and [VLCT](#) provide fuller details on outcomes of the legislative session.

Takeaways from VLCT Presentation on Commercial Cannabis

On May 24, the VLCT and the Cannabis Control Board (CCB) co-hosted a webinar on "Regulating Cannabis – What Municipal Officials Need to Know" (see [webinar recording](#) and [slide deck](#) here). The presentation and Q&A provided information of interest to municipalities seeking to understand local regulatory authority and coordination with the state licensing process of the CCB.

The CCB has a webpage with [information for municipalities](#). According to the site, 68 municipalities have approved retail cannabis sales to date and 12 municipalities have established local commissions to issue licenses for commercial cannabis establishments. Contact Cat Bryars at cbryars@bcrcvt.org for more information on this topic.

New BCRC Public Health and Health Equity Webpage Describes Ongoing Projects

BCRC has developed a new "Healthy Communities" webpage with information about substance use prevention, food systems, and BCRC's new health equity programs. Read about our past and current public health work, and contact [Callie Fishburn](#) for more information.

[Healthy Communities - BCRC \(bcrcvt.org\)](#)

VT DEC Launches Permit Navigator Tool

The Agency of Natural Resources has developed an online tool called the [Permit Navigator](#) to help determine what permits are needed for proposed developments in Vermont. This tool expedites access to the permit checklist commonly known as a "Project Review Sheet" that inventories all permits a given development is likely to require, from wastewater permitting to Act 250 review. Projects occurring across multiple land parcels or involving other complexities will be directed to work directly with ANR permit specialists to obtain a traditional Project Review Sheet, but projects on single parcels can now obtain a Permit Navigator Result document quickly online. The tool also allows a user to look up permits that have been issued across ANR's various programs. See the tool [tutorial](#) online.

STATE OF VERMONT
Agency of Natural Resources

Welcome to the Permit Navigator!
Use our permit questionnaire to get a downloadable/printable guide to help you guide through the permitting and planning processes and to help you learn about what may be required based on your unique situation. [Get Started](#)

Permit Lookup [View All ANR Permits](#)
Choose a program and a related permit to narrow the results, or [view all ANR permits](#).

* Program
-- Choose one --

USDA and EDA Launch Resource Guide to Boost Economic Development in Rural Communities

USDA Rural Development and the U.S. Economic Development Administration have launched a joint [Resource Guide](#) to help community organizations access USDA and EDA funding programs, and build strategies that promote sustainable economic development.

Updated Statewide Highway Flood Vulnerability and Risk Map Available for Local Hazard Mitigation Planning

The Statewide Highway Flood Vulnerability and Risk Map is complete and ready to be used for hazard mitigation planning. Bookmark the VTrans website [Here](#) to find a description of the methodology for determining flood vulnerable road segment and structures. The mapping tool is linked to the website and should be used for new and updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plans.”

Updated Tool to Track Clean Energy Progress in Small Cities

ACEEE today releases its updated [Local Clean Energy Self-Scoring Tool](#), enabling small and midsize cities to measure their progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving money through energy efficiency and clean energy. The new version of the tool places greater emphasis on whether municipalities are focusing on racial and social equity in their clean energy policies. It expands its focus on whether clean energy policies are achieving measurable progress.

The tool’s User Guide shows how to evaluate progress on community-wide initiatives, building policies, transportation programs, energy and water utilities, and local government operations. Based on ACEEE’s 2021 *City Clean Energy Scorecard*, which ranks 100 large U.S. cities on their clean energy efforts, the self-scoring tool can be used to see how smaller and midsize local governments’ clean energy measures compare to the larger cities evaluated by ACEEE.

New Wood Pellet Heating System and Summer Programming at Sage Street Mill in North Bennington

Thanks to a grant from [Vermont Afterschool](#), Sage Street Mill has been able to expand its summer programming. Highlights include:

- Organic Farming and Raised Bed Gardening for all ages
- Weekly Intergenerational arts, gardening and lunch activity
- Subsidized slots for low-income families and at-risk youth to attend camps
- New public transportation in partnership with Green Mountain Express
- New extended day along with art reception, music, food and family activities 4-7pm on Fridays

Visit the [Sage Street Mill website](#) for more information.

The Sage Street Mill recently installed a pellet boiler heating system which has helped them reduce their carbon footprint by 85%!



Events and Opportunities....

FREE & Self-Paced Online Floodplain Management Training. This training is hosted in partnership with ASFPM and will help new and experienced floodplain administrators, emergency managers, elected officials, and others learn more about the NFIP and its requirements. New floodplain administrators will also learn how floodplain management decisions affect insurance, health, and public safety. No professional membership is required. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Register to Participate in the 2022 Vermont Maple 100! Registration is now open for the 2022 Vermont Maple 100! This fall, join the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, in partnership with Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing and organizations from all across the state, to help visitors and Vermonters alike discover new ways to enjoy Vermont's sweetest treat! The Maple 100 is a month-long, annual promotion highlighting the hundreds of maple activities, adventures, and maple-inspired products available across Vermont. Application closes July 30th. Contact Kristen Wirkkala at kristen.wirkkala@vermont.gov with any questions!

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. The next round of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program is now accepting applications. All projects under the current round of HMGP funding will be eligible to receive a 90% federal cost share, requiring only a 10% local match. The deadline has been extended to September 30, 2022. Click [here](#) for more information or contact [Cat Bryars](#).

Increased Funding for FY23 Building Communities Grants. The Department of Buildings and General Services once again has increased funding for building communities grants.
\$300,000.00 – Recreational Facilities Grant Program
\$300,000.00 – Regional Economic Development Grant Program
\$150,000.00 – Human Services Facilities Grant Program
\$150,000.00 – Educational Facilities Grant Program
Click [here](#) for more information or contact [Jonathan Cooper](#).

Save the Date: August 10th, Vermont Community Leadership Summit

The 2022 event, presented by the VT Council on Rural Development, will include skills workshops, networking opportunities, community project panels, and forum discussions with over 500 leaders from across Vermont! VT Technical College in Randolph will host the all-inclusive summit. Registration opens in July. More information will be coming soon. www.vtrural.org

Better Places Grants. If you are thinking of more parks and green spaces, a vibrant main street, public art projects, and community gardens, Better Places grants can help turn those ideas into reality. The statewide community grant program is supported by the VT Department of Housing & Community Development, the VT Department of Health, and VT Community Foundation. There is no deadline to apply. Projects are accepted on a rolling basis while funding is available. The Better Places program anticipates offering two rounds of funding in 2022.

Visit the website for more information: [Better Places](#)

Efficiency Vermont's Energy Loan This loan program offers affordable financing options to help residential and business customers move forward with energy efficiency projects designed to deliver savings and spur the economy. Find out more: [Energy Loan](#)

USDA Rural Development Home Repair Loan Program. Federal regulations have made it easier for low-income rural residents to rehab and repair their homes through USDA [504 Home Repair Loans & Grants](#). The program provides funding for low income homeowners to repair, improve or modernize their homes, and/or remove health and safety hazards.”

VT Farm Fund New Producer Loan Are you thinking about projects for your farm or food business this spring, but wondering how to cover the up-front costs? The VT Farm Fund can help. The [Business Builder Loan](#) is for farm businesses to invest and innovate for growth. The VT Farm Fund is a program of The Center for an Agricultural Economy. Contact info@vermontfarmfund.org for more information.

FREE Wood Heat Assessments for VT Small Businesses. The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, in partnership with VEIC, announces the availability of free assessments for Vermont small businesses interested in switching from fossil fuels for their heating needs to Advanced Wood Heat (AWH). AWH includes a wide scale of technologies, from small EPA certified wood stoves all the way to wood chip boilers appropriate for large commercial buildings. To be considered for participation in the program, businesses should complete this short [intake form](#). Click [here](#) for more information about wood energy and rebates.

Rural Fire Protection Grant Program. The VT Rural Fire Protection Task Force and VT Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) is offering maximum grant awards of \$10,000 per project/system. The installation of new dry hydrants and other types of rural water supplies are still a priority of the program, but other eligible projects are included. Click [here](#) for more information and to download the application.

FREE Energy Savings Kits from Efficiency VT. Vermonters can sign up to receive a free home energy savings kit from Efficiency VT that includes LED lightbulbs and water saving devices. [Sign up](#) to get yours today!

Farmers Markets of Bennington County. Farmers Markets are in full swing in Vermont! This summer, visit Bennington County’s four regular farmers markets in [Arlington](#), [Bennington](#), [Dorset](#), and [Manchester](#) to stock up on local food and other Vermont products.

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