



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

March 2023

March BCRC Meeting - FEMA Flood Mapping and the Dorset Housing Study

Thursday, March 16 at 5:30 PM

**Park House
340 Rec Park Road
Manchester Center, VT**

Or join via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81069591745?pwd=Y1hQV3BLZFFTTTS9DWHZqRHBYaU01UT09>

A light meal will be provided.

After the meal, join us for a presentation from Ned Swanberg, Flood Plain Manager at the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, about the FEMA flood maps update Process and what it means for Vermont communities. Following Ned Swanberg, BCRC staff members Jonathan Cooper and Scott Grimm-Lyon will present their findings from the Dorset Housing Study.



No RSVP necessary

Vermont Legislature Considers Omnibus Housing Bill

The “HOMES” Act, S.100, a bill aiming to increase housing supply and housing opportunities in Vermont, recently passed out of the Senate Economic Development Committee to the Senate Natural Resources Committee. The broad ranging bill primarily proposes limitations for municipal zoning regulations and exemptions from Act 250 permit requirements in state designated areas (designated downtowns, growth centers, village centers, and neighborhood development areas) that would remove barriers to housing development. The bill also proposes appropriations to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) and other state programs to incentivize housing development, enhance the Vermont Rental Housing Improvement Program (VHIP), improvements for mobile homes and mobile home parks, increase first generation home ownership, and safeguard against housing discrimination.

Highlights of the zoning provisions include the following:

- Duplexes must be allowed in all zoning districts in which single-family homes are allowed.
- Fourplexes must be allowed in all districts that are served by municipal water and sewer.
- In zoning districts with municipal water and sewer services, residential density of 4 or more dwelling units per acre must be allowed.
- In districts served by municipal water and sewer an extra floor allowing an increase in residential density of up to 40% must be allowed.
- Standards for duplexes, multifamily, and accessory dwelling units (ADU) cannot be more restrictive than those for single-family dwellings.
- No more than 1 parking space per dwelling unit may be required in downtown districts, and no more than 1.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit may be required in other residential districts.
- Minor subdivisions may be approved administratively by a zoning administrator without a public hearing before the Development Review Board (DRB), or Planning Commission for towns without a DRB.
- Emergency shelters must be an allowed use.
- Hotels must be allowed to rent rooms through the state emergency housing assistance program.
- Appeal of housing development approvals based on “character of the area” is prohibited.
- Any ten persons as petitioners to appeal will no longer be allowed. An appellant must be an abutting landowner or other interested party.
- Towns cannot require more stringent energy standards than the Vermont residential building energy standards (RBES) or stretch codes.

The bill would also prohibit private deed restrictions or covenants from requiring minimum house sizes or more than one parking space per dwelling unit. If passed as currently drafted the bill would require regional plans to identify housing needs and include actions to achieve state identified targets for adequate and affordable housing supply. Town plans would be required to address housing needs for low- and moderate-income Vermonters and address the impacts of short-term rentals (STR) on the local housing market.

Although the bill was passed out of one senate committee, there are multiple additional legislative steps to go before the bill would become law and revisions are likely as negotiations proceed. For more details on the full or specific provisions of the bill see:

[Draft Bill Template \(vermont.gov\)](#)

[S.100~Ellen Czajkowski~Summary Chart~2-24-2023.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

BCRC Welcomes New Regional Planner, Samantha Page

Samantha Page joined the staff at BCRC in mid-January. Samantha will be working with BCRC on a part-time basis as she finishes her master's program in Urban Planning at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. She will begin full time work with BCRC in late Spring. In addition to her degree in urban Planning from Harvard, Samantha brings much-needed additional GIS skills to our organization. Following her graduation from Smith College, and prior to returning to graduate school, Samantha worked at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown. We are delighted to have Samantha join BCRC and we hope you will welcome her when you meet her later this year.



Northside/Kocher Drive Intersections Project Moves Forward

The project aimed at enhancing three adjacent intersections along Northside/Kocher Drive in Bennington is making progress. These intersections include the Route 7/Kocher Drive/Route 7A intersection, the Route 7A/Northside Drive/Aldi's intersection, and the Route 7A/Orchard Rd./Hicks Ave. intersection. The need for the intersections improvements was identified by the BCRC in a 2018 study. In 2022, the BCRC's Transportation Advisory Committee nominated the projects for inclusion in the VTrans' Capital Program as Candidate Projects under Vermont's new project prioritization process. VHB, an engineering firm, is conducting a scoping study to develop design alternatives and analyze project feasibility.

The BCRC's [2018 report](#) recommends replacing the signalized intersections with roundabouts to enhance safety, aesthetics, and efficiency. In particular, the Route 7/Kocher Drive/Route 7A intersection is an unwelcoming gateway to Bennington. All three intersections are on the state's "High Crash Locations" list, with the Route 7/Kocher Drive/Route 7A intersection accounting for 56 crashes and 14 injuries between 2012 and 2016. Roundabouts are known to reduce the occurrence of serious injuries or fatalities resulting from crashes by 78-82% when compared to conventional stop-controlled and signalized intersections [Source FHWA].



VEM To Host Emergency Preparedness Exercises

In October 2024, Vermont Emergency Management will hold a full-scale, statewide exercise called Binary Blizzard. This exercise will test the emergency response of Vermont's emergency management officials, state agencies, local agencies, emergency response organizations, and municipalities. The exercise will be focused on southern Vermont, which creates the perfect opportunity for our municipalities to participate.

Municipalities can participate by planning a workshop to develop a plan to exercise, or exercise an already existing plan through a tabletop exercise. This needs to be completed prior to the statewide exercise. A tabletop exercise is a discussion-based activity in which participants gather to discuss and work through a simulated emergency scenario, from an already existing plan chosen by the municipality. A facilitator guides participants through the scenario or scenarios. Participants discuss roles and the response to the scenario. Many tabletop exercises can be conducted in a few hours. They are a great tool to exercise plans and to identify capabilities and gaps in response. A multi-town tabletop is also an option and would benefit several towns. This would be a great option for smaller municipalities that share resources with neighboring communities. At minimum, VEM would like to have each municipality participate by opening their EOC during the statewide exercise.

Taiga Christie, the Regional Coordinator with VEM, is our regions contact for assisting with the development of tabletop exercises. The state will bring in evaluators and others to run the exercise. Planning these exercises takes time, so please reach out to Allison Strohl (astrohl@bcrcvt.org) or Taiga Christie (Taiga.Christie@vermont.gov) to start the process. Even if your municipality just wants to learn more about the process, Allison and Taiga can meet with potential participants to discuss the details. There are several Bennington County municipalities that have already expressed interest, a neighboring community might be one of them. Reach out so we can make connections and get the planning started.

BCRC Receives Additional Brownfield Funding for Bradford Mill



We recently learned that BCRC will receive an additional \$45,000 of unallocated Vermont ACCD Brownfield Environmental Assessment funds to continue environmental assessments and corrective action planning at the historic Bradford Mill located on Main Street in Bennington. A housing developer, experienced with redevelopment of similar historic mill buildings, seeks to purchase the property from the Lauzon family, operators of Lauzon Machine and Engineering at the site since the early 1960's. Supplemental environmental assessment of groundwater, soils, soil vapor and building materials is required for the development of a corrective action plan. Redevelopment plans include mixed commercial and residential uses. The majority of the building will be converted into a 25 unit apartment building with a

target of 20% of the units dedicated towards affordable and workforce housing. Contact Jim Henderson, BCRC Brownfield Redevelopment Program Manager, for additional information.

jhenderson@bcrcvt.org

Bennington Armory Reuse Plan Study Nearing Completion

With generous funding from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development's Municipal Planning Grant Program, BCRC staff members Jonathan Cooper and Scott Grimm-Lyon have been working closely with personnel from the Town of Bennington to produce a Reuse Plan for the Vermont Army National Guard Armory in downtown Bennington. The Armory, which will become the possession of the Town of Bennington upon completion of a new Readiness Center on Bowen Road, was built in 1923 and has recently undergone an extensive series of environmental remediation projects. Jonathan and Scott have recently submitted a draft of their final report to a Steering Committee assembled to direct the BCRC's work, and will deliver a presentation to the public at a Select Board meeting in the spring.

As part of their efforts, Scott and Jonathan reviewed the Armory's remarkable history in Bennington; procured plans and maintenance records from the National Guard; organized guided tours of the facility for steering committee members; interviewed municipal employees about existing needs; examined other instances of Armory reuse communities across Vermont and nearby locations in neighboring states; and surveyed leaders from the business, nonprofit, and cultural sectors to provide context for the Armory's potential uses in Bennington. What follows is an excerpt from the draft report:



One of the most consistent community partners in the Armory's early years was Bennington College, with a number of college-affiliated initiatives regularly performing there through the middle decades of the 20th century. The most prominent of these, the Bennington School of the Dance, relied on the Armory for staging the capstone performances of the school's summer sessions, primarily in the 1930s. A number of these works then debuted in New York City in the fall. The pipeline of new and innovative dance works was so substantial that one New York *Times* columnist, John Martin, regularly traveled to Bennington to report on the Armory performances in that era.

In one piece, from August 16, 1935, Martin describes a scene from downtown Bennington that many revitalization professionals would like to capture in a bottle: "The house had been sold out for more than a week, so that an additional performance was given in advance on Wednesday, and this also was packed to the doors with an audience of enthusiasts from all over the country. Both evenings were characterized by the excitement of a gala season, and the quiet little town itself took on an unfamiliar air of gayety with crowds of people in evening dress in its streets and its restaurants packed to the guards."

New Funding Resources Page Available on BCRC Website

Thank you to Callie Fishburn for a revamp of the BCRC website to include a new [Funding Opportunities](#) page with a direct link from the BCRC landing page. Callie has listed and categorized short-term and long-term funding opportunities available to regional municipalities, businesses and not-for-profit organizations. This page will be continuously updated as new grants become available and others expire. We hope you will check it out and share it with your networks.

Dorset Housing Study Team Presents Findings, Discusses Options

For more than a year, the inadequacy of Vermont's housing stock to meet the needs of its residents has been a topic of intense discussion. Although the pandemic has prompted much of this conversation, the underlying basics – the tension between the state's wealth of larger homes built for larger families, and the housing needs of a state in which 70 percent of households have only one or two residents – have been true for much longer.

In several of Vermont's rural towns, a number of factors have generated circumstances in which accessing the local housing market is exceptionally difficult. This not only makes it difficult for new and existing residents to follow the established "rental home, starter home, family home" pattern, it can prevent seniors and other residents who want to remain in their communities from downsizing as their needs and interests change. In the Town of Dorset, BCRC staff members Scott Grimm-Lyon and Jonathan Cooper have been working to understand these challenges on a local level as part of a Housing Needs Assessment and Municipal Toolkit for the town.

In late February, Scott and Jonathan presented findings from their research to the Select Board. In addition to a review of the most recent data pertaining to household size, cost burden status, and other relevant metrics, the presentation detailed models for municipal involvement in housing development. As the town looks to establish a task force to evaluate the potential for new housing in Dorset, BCRC looks forward to engaging with residents and town officials on this essential matter.

What BCRC Staff are Reading/Listening To

Bill is reading ["The Role of Funding to Help Rural Places Thrive"](#) from the Daily Yonder.

Jim Henderson has been reading [Sandgate Voices](#). This collection of stories, in the words of past and present Sandgate residents, was compiled by Nancy Tschorn in celebration of Sandgate's 250th anniversary.

Jonathan is reading ["Senior Housing That Seniors Actually Like"](#) from the New York Times.

Callie is reading ["Widening Highways Doesn't Fix Traffic. So Why Do We Keep Doing It?"](#) from the New York Times, and ["Heavier Storms Are Here. Rain Gardens Can Help"](#) from Mother Jones.

Scott is listening to ["How much does Vermont's power grid depend on fossil fuels?"](#) from Vermont Public Radio.

Events and Opportunities....

Vermont Returnship Program Workshop for Job Seekers: March 16th at 2pm

This workshop is titled the Smart Job Search and will be offered in a hybrid format, in-person at the Burlington VDOL office at 63 Pearl St. or on Zoom. <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85966255834>

Thermal Energy Networks for Vermont Webinar Series

Putting Thermal Networks to Work: Achieving Climate Goals and Policy Solutions - Monday, March 20th at noon. Hosted by Energy Action Network - [Learn more and register to attend here.](#)

The Benefits and Business of Thermal Energy Networks - Tuesday, April 4th at noon. Hosted by Renewable Energy Vermont - [Learn more and register to attend here.](#)

VLCN Workshop: Who Can Help? Federal Funding Assistance and Support

Friday, March 24 | 10:00-11:30 | Virtual

Many Vermont communities are aware of the plethora of new state and federal funding opportunities. New and existing resources are available to help community leaders access this funding. Hear from a panel of providers about the support they offer and how communities can benefit from their services. Register [here](#).

How Much Money Can You Get from the Inflation Reduction Act?

Check out Rewiring America's [savings calculator](#) and [other IRA resources](#) collected by the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN).

Congressionally Directed Spending Application Portal Now Open

Senator Sanders' office is now accepting applications as part of the Fiscal Year 2024 Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) process. More information can be found on the Senator's website [here](#). The deadline for submission is **Friday, March 10 at 5:00 p.m.**

AARP Community Challenge Grants

The [AARP Community Challenge](#) provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. In 2023, the AARP Community Challenge is accepting applications across three different grant opportunities, two of which are new this year. Applications are due on March 15 at 5:00 p.m.

Health Equity and Community Design TA Pilot Program

From safer, walkable, universally accessible streets to more green spaces, the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) in partnership with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is excited to announce the launch of a technical assistance pilot to support community-led design, placemaking, and healthy equity projects across Vermont. Approximately 20 to 35 communities will be accepted for in-person and virtual engagement sessions between December 2022 and October 2023. Visit the Healthy Communities Vermont website to [learn more](#).

Funding Available through the Better Places Program

Better Places is a non-competitive, community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public places serving Vermont's [designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas](#). The program provides one-on-one project coaching, local fundraising support, and two to one (2:1) matching grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$40,000 to make your community-led placemaking ideas happen. The program accepts applications on a rolling basis. Visit the [website](#) for more information.

Green Mountain Job & Retention Program

The State of Vermont, in collaboration with the University of Vermont (UVM) and the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC), is offering a loan repayment program to incentivize and retain new graduates from Vermont state colleges and universities. Any graduate during the spring 2023 academic year with a Bachelor of Science and/or Bachelor of Arts can apply for the award. Awards will be distributed as student loan repayments by VSAC to the recipient's student loan servicer. Graduates must be authorized to earn the award through the application on a first-come, first-served basis based on regional, employer, and institutional distribution criteria. Applicants must submit proof of employment when applying. UVM will confirm employment with the Vermont-based employer at two points: After one year of employment and after the second year of employment. Click [here](#) for more information.

Community Recovery & Revitalization Program Grants

CRRP grants are available to for-profit, nonprofit, and municipal applicants. The funding is intended for projects making capital improvements or capital expansions that spur economic recovery and revitalization in communities across the state. Eligible projects may include those that assist industries most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic such as arts and entertainment, hospitality, agriculture, and educational services. The funding is also available for capital expenditures that support childcare and affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households, and to establish or improve municipal water and wastewater systems to build housing or create jobs through business creation and expansion. Projects must show a COVID impact. In Bennington there are also two qualified census tracts (QCTs) that provide additional flexibility for applicants. <https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/funding-incentives/community-recovery-and-revitalization-program>

Last Chance for Free Energy Savings Kits!

Order your [free energy savings kit](#) from Efficiency VT before lighting incentives end on July 1st. The kit includes LED lightbulbs, faucet aerators, and a low-flow showerhead.

Advanced Wood Heat and Biodiesel Heating Incentives

Incentives for wood and biodiesel heating systems are available through the Vermont Renewable Energy Resource Center with new income-eligible adders. Visit the [RERC website](#) for more information.

BCRC Staff Contacts

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