



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

March 2024

March BCRC Meeting - Statewide Housing Legislation & Tools

Thursday, March 21st at 5:30 PM

**GNAT-TV Offices
6378 Route 7A, Suite 1
Sunderland, VT**

A light meal will be provided.

After the business portion of the meeting, Amy Tomasso from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development will give an overview of the [Homes for All Toolkit](#) which just launched this month. The toolkit will serve as a guide to communities to help them develop diverse housing solutions with a focus on missing middle housing. Missing middle housing includes housing types such as duplexes, triplexes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and small-scale multi-unit buildings. Developing missing middle housing is an important strategy for addressing Vermont's housing crisis. After the toolkit presentation, Representative Seth Bongartz, will provide an overview of housing and permitting legislation.



Missing middle housing in Bennington.

BCRC Workforce & Education Committee Prepares for Career Month



Students and volunteers at the Financial Reality Fair at Mount Anthony Union High School.

The BCRC Workforce & Education Committee had a busy January and is looking forward to April Career Month. Two of the Committee's marquee events, the Financial Reality Fair and the Sophomore Summit, took place in January with over 420 students participating in the two events. Plans for a wide variety of events to celebrate April Career Month are also in full swing and all the latest [information on the committee's work](#) can now be found on BCRC's website thanks to Dara Zink.

Last Chance to Take the Bennington Town Plan Survey!

The Bennington Planning Commission wants to know what you love about Bennington and what you want to see change in the future! In only 5-10 minutes, you can share input on your favorite parts of Bennington and how you would like to see Bennington become a better place to live, work, learn, shop, and play.

Your response will inform the update of the Bennington Town Plan. The Planning Commission is seeking input from as many community members as possible to make sure the new plan reflects the whole community. Anyone who lives, works, studies, or spends time in Bennington is encouraged to share their perspective.

You can complete the survey online (<https://forms.office.com/r/Sc6w3KPkDA>) or on a printed copy available at the town office on South Street. For more information about the Town Plan Update process and our schedule of events, please visit the Town's webpage (tinyurl.com/bton2050).

Save the Date!
BCRC Annual Meeting
Thursday, May 16th at 5:30PM
The Arlington Inn
Stay tuned for more details!

Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance Hosts Fix It Fun Event

On Feb. 17, 2024 the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance partnered with the Bennington Free Library to host a community repair event called Fix It Fun.

Area residents brought their broken and damaged items, including small appliances, clothing, electronics, and bicycles to the library, where volunteer carpenters, electricians, tailors, and technicians helped assess whether the item was able to be repaired, and repaired it on site when they were able.

“The hope is that the event will promote the idea of repair as a key tool for sustainability and reducing waste. By volunteering you will help build a stronger community and promote the value of being handy to our youth.” Said Scott Grimm-Lyon Program Manager for BCSWA.

The event was funded with a \$5,000 Sustainable and Resilient New England Libraries Grant, which provided funds to reimburse fixer volunteers for items they are using to repair items, and gifts for event participants. Only a fraction of the money was spent to host the Feb. 17th event so BCSWA and BPL have agreed to host a second Fix It Fun event in November of 2024.



Batten Kill Watershed Alliance Receives Grant from Trout and Salmon Foundation

BCRC provided grant writing and additional technical assistance for the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance's (BKWA) successful grant application to the Trout and Salmon Foundation. The BKWA was awarded \$4,500 to continue their on-going public outreach, riparian habitat restoration and floodplain restoration efforts. Riparian property owners are encouraged to reach out to Jim Henderson, jhenderson@bcrct.org, if they are interested in acquiring trees and shrubs to enhance their riparian buffer zones.



The Sandgate Cub Scouts and their families assist with a riparian buffer planting on River Road in Arlington. Conservation merit badges were awarded for their efforts.

BCRC Brownfields Program Update

Thanks to three consecutive grants through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the BCRC Brownfield Redevelopment Program has been very active over the past two years. These grants, which began in 2022 and will continue through 2025, have addressed the following sites with perceived or known environmental hazards:

- The Sweeney Sawmill is located at 250 Town Shed Road in Manchester. This parcel will be acquired by the Town of Manchester to allow expansion of the adjacent Manchester Department of Public Works.
- 301 Depot Street, Manchester. Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs) have been completed and are currently being reviewed by the Vermont DEC. Redevelopment plans include a mix of commercial and office space with future site development anticipated.
- Lauzon Machine and Engineering, known locally as the Bradford Mill, is located at 757 Main Street in Bennington. Phase 1 and Phase 2 ESAs have been completed and a Corrective Action Plan is currently being developed. Redevelopment plans include a mix of work force and market rate housing.
- Benn High is located at 650 Main Street in Bennington. Phase 1 and Phase 2 ESAs have been completed and a hazardous building materials assessment is currently underway. Corrective Action Planning will commence shortly. Redevelopment includes a mix of workforce and market rate housing and a variety of community-based services including a senior center, meals on wheels, a daycare facility and indoor recreational space.

These grants require that all perspective purchases enter the Brownfield Redevelopment Limited Liability Program which provides these parties liability protection from future identified environmental hazards. BCRC extends much appreciation for the support of the Mount Ascutney Regional Planning Commission which has been managing these grants.

BCRC Staff Attend Scenario Planning Conference in Portland, OR

In early February, BCRC staff members, Samantha Page and Callie Fishburn, attended the Consortium for Scenario Planning Conference in Portland, OR. This annual conference hosted by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy brings together urban and regional planners, academics, and private planning consultants to discuss ways to apply scenario planning to their work. Scenario planning is a method of planning through which communities can explore multiple possible futures and prepare for uncertainty by developing strategies to respond to each possible future. Scenario planning can be applied to a variety of planning topics including climate resilience and hazard mitigation, housing, and community visioning.



Learn more about scenario planning on the [Lincoln Institute website](#). Sam and Callie are excited to apply scenario planning to future BCRC projects.



VMEC Releases 2023 Impact Report

The Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center (VMEC), has released its annual impact report. As Vermont's only singularly-focused resource for manufacturers, VMEC is the official representative of the MEP (Manufacturing Extension Partnership) National Network in the Green Mountain State. Since its inception in 1995, VMEC's federal partner, NIST, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, has used an independent third-party organization to conduct surveys of VMEC clients as well as other MEP Centers across the U.S. and Puerto Rico.



Highlights of the FY 2023 annual report include:

- Over \$58,000,000 in increased and retained sales
- 671 total jobs created; this figure includes direct, indirect and induced jobs
- Over \$50,000,000 in employer wages and benefits for these jobs
- Over \$10,000,000 in client investment and modernization projects
- An average annual compensation of \$68,000 for Vermont manufacturing employees, compared to the average Vermont compensation of \$60,000

Additionally, based on company-reported data over the past three years (April 2020 through March 2023), VMEC client return on investment is 336:1 meaning every one dollar clients spent on VMEC assistance returned an average on that investment of \$336.

"Every year we are grateful to see the impact we make together with our clients in Vermont. It helps add up to a stronger, more resilient Vermont manufacturing sector with good paying jobs for Vermonters," states VMEC Center Director and CEO Patrick Boyle.

To read the complete report, visit [2023 VMEC Impact Report](#).

VT Clean Water Initiative Released 2023 Performance Report

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) released the [VT Clean Water Initiative 2023 Performance Report](#) which highlights water quality progress achieved through public investment over the past eight years. The new report shows how State funding and regulatory programs have helped carry out agricultural conservation practices on thousands of acres of fields and pastures, and improved hundreds of miles of municipal roads through drainage and erosion control best practices. The report also details progress to reduce pollution in Lakes Champlain and Memphremagog. Visit the online Clean Water Interactive Dashboard to explore investment measures and view the data: [Here](#)

Southwestern VT Medical Center Community Health Needs Assessment Underway

Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) is initiating a comprehensive health assessment of the communities it serves. Conducted every 3 years, the Community Health Needs Assessment allows SVMC to understand the current health needs of its region, assess the services available to residents, and identify where and how improvements can be made. The short, anonymous survey will ascertain health and wellness information from respondents and will help to identify health-related priorities at the community-level. You can access the survey [here](#).

What BCRC Staff are Reading/Listening To

Jim is reading [Cracked, The Future of Dams in a Hot, Chaotic World](#) by Steven Hawley. Hawley takes a critical look at the building of dams and irrigation systems in the arid United States (and elsewhere) while describing the gross costs to society including the negative impacts on natural resources, wild-life, first nation ancestral lands, racism, and extreme budget over runs that began as “public works” projects in the early 1930s and continue today.

Callie is reading [Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement](#) by Ashley Shew and “[How Many Vermonters are Unhoused?](#)” from VTDigger.

Events and Opportunities....

Homes for All Toolkit Launch and Training Summit | March 14th

Join the VT Department of Housing and Community Development and statewide partners for the [Homes for All](#) Toolkit Launch and Training on March 14! This interactive event is for novice and emerging small-scale home builders seeking to start developing new and renovated homes in Vermont, community development professionals and local leaders looking for new housing tools to support Vermonters, and anyone interested in innovative solutions to Vermont's housing crisis. [Learn more and register here.](#)

Amy Tomasso of the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development will attend the March 21st BCRC Meeting in Sunderland to discuss the toolkit as well.

VCLN Workshop: Community Trusts and Your Town | March 15th

Join community leaders from across Vermont to learn about Community Trusts on March 15th from 10-11:30 AM on Zoom. A community trust is a 501c3 organization with a locally-based mission to revitalize and sustain resilient and vibrant rural communities. In this workshop we will share best practices and strategies for the formation of community trusts, examples of successful projects led by existing trusts, and the details of a new initiative to support and fund the formation of community trusts to lead brick and mortar projects in Vermont's village centers. We look forward to hearing from the following speakers: Nicole Gratton with the Preservation Trust of Vermont; Trevor Braun with the Elmore Community Trust; Debra Fuller with the Rupert Community Trust; and Anne Rider with the Friends of Algiers Village. [Register Here.](#)

Local Emergency Management Plan Training | March 25th

On March 25th at 2pm, Vermont Emergency Management and BCRC will be providing a Local Emergency Management Plan Refresher Training for Municipalities and EMDs. This training will be offered virtually and in-person. Register here: <https://forms.office.com/r/qHvw9LweEg> Please join us to see the new WebEOC system and brush up on the requirements of the LEMP that is due by May 1st.

VECAN Winter Webinar: How to Develop a Thermal Energy Network | March 13th

Several Vermont energy committees are exploring how they can bring Thermal Energy Networks to their towns, using geothermal and waste heat to provide clean heating and cooling. This webinar on Wednesday March 13th at Noon shares the experiences and approaches of Vermonters already working to develop Thermal Energy Networks. We'll also introduce a new toolkit from Energy Action Network's TENs Team: How to Develop a Thermal Energy Network. [Register here.](#)

Regional Emergency Management Committee Meeting | May 14th at 6 PM

The next Regional Emergency Management Committee meeting will be held on May 14th at 6pm. This meeting will be held in the Kilburn Room at the Manchester Town Offices located at 40 Jeff Williams Way, Manchester Center, VT 05255. More information and registration will be sent out in the beginning of April and posted at [Regional Emergency Management Committee - BCRC \(bcrct.org\)](http://RegionalEmergencyManagementCommittee-BCRC(bcrct.org)).

Complete Streets Winter Webinar Series

Local Motion is hosting a [series of webinars](#) to help communities improve walking and biking infrastructure. Upcoming webinars:

March 21st: How (and Why) to Build Great Bike Parking

April 18th: Low-Cost Traffic Calming Techniques and Walk/Bike Solutions for Rural Vermont

Better Places Grants

If your town is thinking of more parks and green spaces, a vibrant main street, public art, and community gardens, Better Places grants can help. The statewide program is supported by VT Department of Housing & Community Development, VT Department of Health, and VT Community Foundation. Projects are accepted on a **rolling basis**. Visit the website: [Better Places](#)

Community Heart & Soul

The Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant Program is uniquely designed for small cities and towns (population 2,500-30,000). Successful applicants will receive \$10,000 grants to match funding from a participating municipality or a partnering organization. Apply [Here](#). Awards are made on a **rolling basis**.

VTRANS Electrify Your Fleet Program

The Electrify Your Fleet Incentive Program aims to accelerate the retirement of internal combustion engine vehicles. A pool of \$500,000 is available to all Vermont commercial, municipal and nonprofit fleet owners. The rebate has designated up to \$2,500 for each vehicle replaced or avoided. Funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Fleet owners must fill out the online preliminary application form [Here](#). Deadline is on a **rolling basis**.

[Take the Locally Led Conservation Survey!](#)

Provide input on state and federal spending on agriculture and natural resources in your community.

BCRC Staff Contacts

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