



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

November 2022

November BCRC Meeting - The Arlington Common Project and Vermont Creative Network

Thursday, November 17 at 5:30 PM

The Arlington Common
3938 VT Rte. 7A
Arlington, VT

A light meal from Bonnie & Clyde's Corner Market will be provided. No remote meeting option is available.

After the meal, join us for presentations from staff at Arlington Common and the Vermont Arts Council. The Arlington Common is a community hub for wellness and creative activities. They host a variety of fitness classes, art and history exhibits, and offer space for community events. After the Arlington Common update, Johanna de Graffenried of the Vermont Arts Council will discuss the Vermont Creative Network and the CreateVT Action Plan. The CreateVT Action Plan provides a vision and roadmap for a thriving Vermont creative sector that is essential to the vitality of the state's economy. The Plan was recognized as the 2022 Plan of the Year by the Vermont Planners Association and the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association.



No RSVP necessary

A Farewell Message from Executive Director Jim Sullivan

So Long and Thanks for All the Fish

Douglas Adams' classic phrase refers, of course, to the final message sent by dolphins as they left Earth just prior to its destruction. Fortunately, my retirement from the Bennington County Regional Commission doesn't presage any such cataclysm, but I would be remiss not to use my final BCRC News and Notes to say thank you to all the good people I've worked with over the past 33 years. Bill Colvin will be assuming the position of Executive Director in November and my last day with the Commission will be December 23.



I began working at the BCRC in 1989 after spending three years with the Town of Manchester. Originally hired after passage of Vermont's landmark (at the time) planning law, Act 200, to help the region and its municipalities develop plans and implementing regulations consistent with a new set of statewide planning goals, I eventually had the opportunity to work in a variety of areas: transportation planning and project management, environmental conservation, brownfields assessment, community development, and energy planning (everyone reading this piece will be relieved to hear that this will be my first and last mention of energy planning!). For the past twelve years, I have been privileged to serve as the Commission's Executive Director.

It certainly has been a rewarding career, and to the extent that my efforts contributed to improvements to the physical and social fabric of our local communities, I can only thank a remarkable array of dedicated people: my co-workers at the BCRC and our volunteer commissioners, town and village officials and staff, business and nonprofit organization leaders, citizen volunteers, legislators, technical consultants, and employees of numerous state and federal agencies. Thanks to all of you, we live in a beautiful and vibrant region that is going to continue to grow and prosper because of your shared goals and willingness to collaborate and compromise to achieve success.

A strong and effective organization must be able to respond to change by addressing new challenges and by taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. And I firmly believe that organizational leadership needs to evolve to remain effective. So as I do my part by moving on from the BCRC, it is clear that Bill and his team have the organization well positioned to move forward in ways that will meet the current and future needs of the residents of our seventeen unique but connected towns and villages.

A final note of thanks to my family who endured my thousands of evening meetings and Saturday mornings at the office. And best wishes to my wife, Leslie Addison, who has persevered through all of that and now will find out what it is like to not have me away from home so often!

Happy trails...
Jim Sullivan

**Save the date for Jim's retirement party!
Thursday, December 8th from 4:30-7PM
Harvest Brewing in Downtown Bennington**

BCRC Says Goodbye to Planning Director Cat Bryars

Director of Planning, Cat Bryars, has left BCRC after six years to become the interim director of Shires Housing, southwest Vermont's non-profit housing developer. Her last day was October 31st, and she began her new position at Shires on November 1st. Cat joined BCRC in 2016 and has since then managed the organization's municipal and regional planning program, working with all 17 municipalities on town plan and bylaw updates, village and downtown designations, and numerous special planning projects. She was integral to helping towns adopt new enhanced energy plans when Act 174 was passed in 2016, and she initiated BCRC's foray into public health with her work with the Collaborative for which BCRC won a prevention champion award in 2022. She has raised the profile and priorities of the Bennington region through her leadership with the Vermont Planners Association and Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Upon her departure, Cat shared, "I am so grateful for my time at the BCRC, and perhaps above all enjoyed the relationships I built with local community leaders and coworkers over the past years. Citizen engagement is the engine of community development, and I've been fortunate to witness firsthand the time and talents that the region's citizen leaders commit to improving their communities. I look forward to continuing to work throughout the region to address the housing challenges that are integrally linked with our economic growth and vibrancy. This isn't *goodbye*, this is *see you soon!*"

Although Cat's departure is bittersweet, we wish her the best in her new endeavor and look forward to working with her in her new role at Shires Housing. Cat can be reached at cat.bryars@shireshousing.org.



Cat presenting at a public meeting in Sandgate in 2021

Southern VT Communications Union District Receives \$9M for Broadband Deployment

The [Southern Vermont Communications Union District](#) (So VT CUD) recently received approval for its \$9 million internet fiber construction grant from the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB). The grant, along with a \$3.3 million investment from Consolidated Communications, will cover 6,412 addresses across southern Vermont. The CUD, in partnership with Consolidated Communications, who will build, maintain and operate the network, expects all unserved and underserved residents in 14 towns in the CUD to have access to Fidium Fiber's multi-gigabit speed internet in 2023 at competitive prices. Read the full press release [here](#).



Bennington County Organizations Receive Building Communities Funding

This year, BCRC staff worked with two businesses to submit applications to the [Building Communities Grants](#) program for Regional Economic Development. The grant, offered by the Governor's Department of Buildings and General Services, provides 1:1 funding, up to \$25,000, for capital improvements made by businesses to improve buildings or acquire equipment. We were pleased to learn that both businesses – C&T Adventure in Pownal and The Gamer's Grotto in Bennington – were awarded \$10,000 for their respective efforts. Crystal Gardner of C&T applied for the funding to offset the costs of acquiring and rehabilitating a dilapidated structure in the Pownal Center Village Center that will serve as a highly visible and easily accessible home base for a suite of the Garder family's ongoing business ventures in bookkeeping, landscaping, and food production. Keith Carey of Gamer's Grotto applied for the funding to help with the structural renovations he is currently making to the historic structure at 425 Main Street that the Grotto and Berkshire Dance Studio have called home for many years. One other local venture, the Bennington Community Market, secured \$20,000 from the same funding source to support the installation of new flooring in the forthcoming market. Congratulations to them, and to the other regional entities – the Town of Shaftsbury, Prospect Mountain Association, Paran Recreations, and Southwestern Vermont Medical Center – who secured funding from the three other grant programs within the Building Communities Grants umbrella. Combined, the seven recipients brought just over \$88,000 in state grant funding to important projects in five of our region's municipalities!

ERAF Funding Available for Vermont Municipalities

The Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) is a program unique to Vermont that outlines steps municipalities can take to increase resiliency, in exchange for a reduction in cost share amounts with the state after a declared disaster. Expenses to repair damaged public infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, drinking water and wastewater systems, public buildings, etc.) can be costly. Vermont regularly contributes 7.5% towards the required 25% non-federal match for FEMA grants after a declared disaster. However, municipalities that complete ERAF requirements can achieve a higher percentage of state funding post-disaster. With ERAF, a municipality could have 12.5% or 17.5% of the 25% non-federal match covered by the state.

To reach 12.5%, a municipality must:

- 1) Participate in the **National Flood Insurance Program**;
- 2) Adopt standards that meet or exceed the most current **Town Road and Bridge Standards**;
- 3) Annually update and adopt the **Local Emergency Management Plan** after town meeting and before May 1st;
- 4) Have a current **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan**, or have a draft plan submitted for review.

To reach 17.5%, a municipality must:

- 5) **Protect River Corridors** from new encroachment; or, protect flood hazard areas from new encroachments and participate in the FEMA Community Rating System.

To see what ERAF steps your municipality has taken, visit the Community Report section on the Vermont Flood Ready website (https://floodready.vermont.gov/assessment/community_reports#Expanded) and select your County, Region, and Community from the drop-down list. For more information or assistance with ERAF, please reach out to Allison Strohl at astrohl@bcrcvt.org.

Release of the VT Working Communities Challenge Initial Policy Report

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has released the Working Communities Challenge Initial Policy Report which provides an overview the program and updates from the eight regional WCC teams in Vermont. From the report, “The Vermont Working Communities Challenge is a unique partnership between state and local leaders, the public and private sectors and among Vermonters looking to improve economic outcomes for their communities. Over the next two and a half years, these teams will create better economic opportunities for their residents and propose systems change solutions for long-term success.” Read the full report [here](#).

Release of the 2022 VAPDA Annual Report

The Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA) has released its 2022 Annual Report highlighting the work of the state’s 11 regional planning commissions. Regional maps show the locations where RPCs have assisted municipalities on a variety of projects including economic development, emergency planning, grant writing, planning and zoning, and more. View the full report [here](#).

\$150,000 Awarded to Local Organizations to Address Health Disparities

BCRC, in partnership with the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) has awarded a total of \$150,000 to five local organizations to address health disparities in Bennington County. Projects were selected by a panel of community grant reviewers convened by the BCRC.

Earlier this year the BCRC received funding from VDH to participate in a statewide health equity-focused learning collaborative. In addition, participating organizations were allocated pass-through funding for community-based organizations working with populations at higher risk of poor health outcomes. The source of the funding is a CDC grant received by each state to address health disparities that were exacerbated by COVID-19.

Funding was granted to the following organizations, each proposing a unique approach to addressing health disparities:

Alliance for Community Transformations (ACT): \$17,000 for the Take Care Project which provides free personal hygiene products to low-income community members.

Bennington County Open Arms (BCOA): \$30,000 to help cover housing costs for newly arrived refugee families.

The Bike Hub: \$24,000 to expand access to, use of, and maintenance of bicycles among low-income individuals.

Greater Bennington Community Services (GBCS): \$75,000 to work with Rural Area Medicine to offer a pop-up clinic in Bennington that will offer no-cost medical, dental, and vision care to the community.

Mt. Anthony Union Middle School: \$4,000 to build an orchard and greenhouse for educational purposes and to provide produce to the community.

Click [here](#) to read more about BCRC’s healthy communities work.

BCRC Aids with Development of Vermont's Watershed Projects Database

Jim Henderson, BCRC's Environmental Program Manager, recently assisted the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in cleaning up our waters by incorporating potential projects and plans into the [State's Watershed Projects Database](#). This database is a key component of the DEC's Tactical Basin planning process that addresses water quality issues throughout Vermont. The Basin Plans prioritize water quality problems, consider alternatives, and recommend solutions and funding sources. The database tracks potential projects to address these problems and assesses how close they are to implementation. For example, some projects are only at the scoping level and require further definition while others have been fully designed with both construction plans and cost estimates prepared.

The BCRC has worked with other basin planning partners including The Bennington County Conservation District, Batten Kill Watershed Alliance and Trout Unlimited to identify projects from a variety of plans that have been developed for the region's towns and villages, including river corridor plans, road erosion inventories, studies on stream erosion, and stormwater master plans. Incorporation into the database or updating the status of these projects will enable DEC basin planners, municipalities, watershed organizations, and others to quickly identify the projects needed to help improve and sustain the quality of our local surface waters and to prioritize the projects that should be implemented first.

This work was funded through the State's 604b water quality program as part of a requirement to pass through to regional planning organizations 40% of DEC's annual federal Clean Water Act Section 604b allocation. For more information, please contact Jim Henderson, BCRC Environmental Program Manager: jhenderson@bcrcvt.org or (802) 442-0713.

What BCRC Staff are Reading



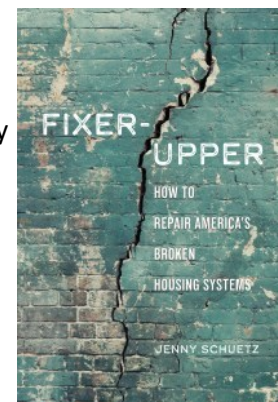
Bill is reading the ["Rural Opportunity Zone and Recovering Playbook"](#), a guide to help rural areas drive investment in their communities.

Scott is listening to Brave Little State on Vermont Public Radio: ["What's the secret to downtown revitalization? Ask White River Junction."](#)

Jim Sullivan is reading [Starry Messenger: Cosmic Perspectives on Civilization](#) by Neil deGrasse Tyson.

Cat is reading [Fixer-Upper: How to Repair America's Broken Housing Systems](#) by Jenny Schuetz.

Callie is reading ["Measuring the Burden of Child Care Costs and its Impact on Health"](#) by County Health Rankings & Roadmaps.



Events and Opportunities....

Vermont Farm to Plate Network Gathering: November 10th

This year's theme is "Cultivating Connections" and will feature breakout sessions and group activities designed to strengthen connections within the network. Scholarships are available. [Register here](#).

Vermont Statewide Housing Conference: November 16th

This is the only conference that brings together housing professionals from across the state to cover a comprehensive range of topics like housing development, single family financing, affordable housing, housing policy, local planning for housing, homelessness, and other special topics. Register [here](#).

Save the Date: Virtual VECAN Conference December 10-15th

The winter virtual conference will commence on Saturday, December 10th and be followed by a series of virtual workshops over the course of three days throughout the following week. In Spring 2023, VECAN hopes to host a larger, in-person event. Click [here](#) for more information.

2023 Transportation Alternatives Program Application Open

VTrans is now accepting applications for the Transportation Alternatives Program. This year, Transportation Alternatives Program funding is available for all eligible activities as described in the Vermont Transportation Alternatives Fall 2022 Application Guide. 50% of grant program funds are reserved for environmental mitigation projects relating to stormwater and highways, including eligible salt and sand shed projects. Click [here](#) for more information.

Special Funding Round for Downtown and Village Center Tax Credits

In January 2023, during this special round of funding, \$800,000 in state income tax credits will be competitively available to projects that enhance the historic character and improve building safety of older and historic commercial and community buildings in these designated communities. The credits support general rehabilitation work, code compliance work, façade improvements, and flood mitigation projects, and may be combined with the federal program.

Applications for the next round of tax credits are due Monday, January 16, 2023, and the Vermont Downtown Board will make allocation decisions at their regularly scheduled board meeting in February 2023. Click [here](#) for more information

Upcoming Funding through the Vermont Diesel Emissions Reduction Financial Assistance Program

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will once again be offering almost **\$300,000** in incentive funding this fall through the [Vermont Diesel Emissions Reduction Financial Assistance Program](#)! This funding will be competitively awarded to projects that reduce emissions from diesel-powered vehicles, engines, and nonroad equipment. Almost \$300,000 will be made available later this fall.

VEDA Short-Term Forgivable Loan Program Now Open

[Vermont Economic Development Authority's \(VEDA\) Short-Term Forgivable Loan Program](#) (FLP) is now accepting applications from businesses, including sole proprietors and not-for-profits, experiencing continued working capital shortfalls as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Priority is being given to applicants from the hardest hit sectors and from Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) owned businesses in all industry sectors. Applicants must meet certain eligibility criteria and demonstrate economic harm caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Loans of up to \$350,000 may be used for eligible operating expenses such as payroll, mortgage interest, rent, and utilities.

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.

Small Grants for Smart Growth Available Through VNRC

The Vermont Natural Resources Council accepts applications to this program on a rolling basis with awards ranging from \$500-\$1500 per project. Projects might involve advocacy for better land use, by getting involved in the “nuts and bolts” work of municipal planning, regulations, or a permitting process. A project could also be a town or local group effort to promote downtown or village center revitalization and historic preservation; to develop a plan for better sidewalks or paths; to identify ways to support housing choice and affordability; or to plan on conserving land for agriculture or forestry. Click [here](#) for more information.

Equitable and Inclusive Communities Funding Available Through VCF

In cooperation with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and the state of Vermont's Office of Racial Equity, the Vermont Community Foundation is seeking proposals from Vermont villages, towns, and cities that close the opportunity gap by supporting local efforts to foster inclusion and belonging for people of all races and backgrounds. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis for projects up to \$10,000. Click [here](#) for more information.

2022 BRIC Funding Announced

The notice of funding has been released for FEMA's annual [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities \(BRIC\) program](#). Applications need to be submitted into State review by [Friday December 9, 2022](#) in [FEMA GO](#). You can view the [fact sheet](#) as well as the [full notice of funding](#).

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Fall Education Series

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department Community Wildlife Program is proud to announce the schedule for our Fall educational series of webinars and trainings. This year we have five new topics planned and will be offering several sessions of each. View the [schedule and register](#).

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