



Bennington County Regional Commission

# *News and Notes*

## *November 2020*

### **Small-Scale Wastewater for Vermont Villages**

#### **\*\* Presentation at November (ZOOM) Meeting of the BCRC \*\***

The regular meeting of the BCRC will be held remotely, via Zoom, at 5:30 PM on Thursday, November 19. The meeting will begin with a presentation on innovative solutions for addressing wastewater issues, and thus housing and economic development, in our village centers. The meeting also will include overviews and discussion of BCRC projects covered on the next few pages of this newsletter. The Zoom link for the meeting can be found at the end of this article or at [www.bcrvvt.org](http://www.bcrvvt.org).

Villages are the centers of community life in Vermont, but small villages struggle to stay vital when new development and redevelopment opportunities are precluded by a lack of wastewater capacity. Despite towns adopting smart growth zoning and planning policies that direct dense, mixed use development to historic village centers, development in these areas often is not possible without new, affordable wastewater infrastructure. For some villages, the wastewater management problem has seemed intractable for years. On one hand, lack of space in these areas excludes reliance on conventional septic systems and leach fields. On the other hand, centralized sewer systems are too costly for village centers, whose modest scale cannot support large-scale infrastructure investments.

Small-scale, clustered or decentralized wastewater systems have been successful in addressing this problem by meeting the local need while staying within the bounds of local budgets. In the early 2000s, Vermont DEC and ACCD launched the [Village Wastewater Solutions Initiative](#) to explore small- and mid-scale wastewater systems to support economic development in Vermont villages. Since then, the initiative has conducted feasibility studies, identified funding options, and published a [workbook](#) for communities seeking suitable wastewater solutions. To date, several communities, including the Villages of Warren and Waitsfield, VT have been successful in using these resources to plan and build systems to support their development goals.

We are fortunate to have two experts join our meeting to provide an overview of community wastewater options. J.B. Hines, AICP, of Birchline Planning LLC has consulted with communities across the country on local water, sustainability, and development issues. Amy Macrellis has worked with Stone Environmental for nearly two decades, providing technical assistance in the areas of water quality research, community wastewater systems, and green infrastructure design. Both assisted Warren and Waitsfield Villages in developing their plans for wastewater management.

Future development in village centers like those in Arlington, Dorset, and South Shaftsbury is linked to wastewater infrastructure. Even smaller village areas such as those in Rupert, Stamford, or Peru may benefit by learning how additional housing and mixed use buildings can be made possible. For more information on this topic, contact [Catherine Bryars](#) at the BCRC.

Zoom meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84392733195?pwd=MG9vTGdrWGJEbGo4aXlta0pOZmd0Zz09&from=addon>

Call in: 1 929 205 6099 Meeting ID: 843 9273 3195



## Franklin Lane Project Awarded Downtown Transportation Fund Grant

The Town of Bennington was awarded a Downtown Transportation Fund grant for improvements to the Franklin Lane alley in the heart of downtown Bennington. With better lighting, pavers, and landscaping, the alley will be transformed from a dingy, dark and uninviting passageway into an attractive, traffic-calmed shared street that will connect Main Street to the municipal parking lot and the Putnam Block's new outdoor public space. The project is a priority for the BCRC and will further our goal of creating pedestrian-friendly downtowns. BCRC staff is assisting with the management and design of the project which, if all goes well, will be constructed next year. For further information on this project and similar opportunities, contact [Mark Anders](#) at the BCRC.



Franklin Lane in downtown Bennington (left) and what a shared street can look like (from Cambridge, MA).

## Putnam Block Redevelopment and BCRC Economic Development Activities

Construction on the initial portion of the \$31MM Phase 1 of the Putnam Block Redevelopment Project is nearing completion. Construction Manager BreadLoaf Corporation has cited November 30<sup>th</sup> as the date for "substantial completion". This initial contract includes all site work, demolition of the former Mount Anthony House wing of the Putnam Hotel and construction of a new four-story structure, exterior renovation of the Putnam Hotel, Winslow Building and Court House/ Pennysaver, including the removal, restoration and reinstallation of historic windows, new roofing, installation of energy efficient heating and cooling systems in all structures, commercial spaces ready for tenants, full buildout of Bennington College Development Office space, and completion of all thirty-one residential units. It is expected that the first residential tenants will begin to move into the property in December and that commercial tenants will begin to occupy the buildings in the first quarter of 2021.



Progress on restoration of interior spaces in the Putnam Block project.

Enjoy this [video tour](#) of current progress on the Putnam Block Redevelopment.

The BCRC's efforts to support the region's businesses through the pandemic, as well as on the Putnam Block Redevelopment, were featured prominently in *Vermont Business Magazine's* October 2020 issue. You can read the article [here](#). For additional information about these economic development initiatives, contact [Bill Colvin](#) at the BCRC.

## Regional Economic Development Grants Awarded

The BCRC worked with two local entrepreneurs to obtain grant funding that will support new businesses. Farm Road Brewing received a \$10,000 award for exterior/interior renovations and plumbing/electrical upgrades for a small brewery and taproom that is being constructed in redeveloped space in downtown Bennington. Another \$10,000 grant went to Brushmill Cider for acquisition of commercial grade cider making equipment.



Renovations underway at Farm Road Brewing

The Regional Economic Development Grant Program is administered by the Department of Buildings and General Services. The goal of the program is to provide competitive grants to municipalities and to nonprofit organizations as defined in chapter 117 of Title 24 for capital costs associated with major maintenance, renovation, or planning related to the development of facilities reasonably expected to create or retain job opportunities in Vermont communities.

Recipients of other Building Communities Grants in the region included funding for recreational facilities at the Bennington Recreation Center, an accessible playground for the United Counseling Service, replacement of a fishing dock at Lake Paran, an expanded childcare center at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, and an updated kitchen at the Sunrise Family Resource Center.

For more information about these programs, contact [Jonathan Cooper](#) at the BCRC.

## Blight Resistant Elms Planted Along the Batten Kill



The American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) once graced Main Streets and town greens though out eastern North America. Devastated by Dutch elm disease, a fungus spread by the elm bark beetle, very few mature elms remain alive today. Numerous organizations, including the Nature Conservancy have been working to develop blight resistant elms. On October 24, the BCRC's Jim Henderson and Alex Stephanson of the Nature Conservancy teamed up with volunteers from The Batten Kill Watershed Alliance and Trout Unlimited to plant 32 blight resistant American Elms at three Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Fishing Access sites along the

Batten Kill main stem. It be wonderful to once again have American Elms providing shade and in-stream woody debris (trout habitat) to the Batten Kill! Contact [Jim Henderson](#) at the BCRC for more information about this project and other work restoring habitats and protecting our waterways.

## BCRC Acquires New Radar Traffic Recorder for Local Projects

The BCRC recently purchased a new Jamar Radar Recorder to conduct vehicle speed studies and traffic counts. The Commission's older radar recorder, also a Jamar, had been working well for the past decade until it developed some internal problems that were unable to be fixed, rendering it obsolete about a year ago. The new radar recorder is half the size of the old recorder, is lighter, has more battery power, can be set up via Bluetooth, comes with a dedicated laptop, and uses a new and improved platform (TRAXpro) to gather and process data. The setup is much easier and takes less time than the older model. Real time data of vehicles going past is even presented on the screen during set up; something that the older model was not capable of.

Jim Henderson and Allison Strohl tested out the new radar recorder at the end of October before setting up its first full run in Rupert. Most studies run six days, the length of one battery charge. The recorder collects speed and volume of all vehicles that pass by. It also collects vehicle length if that information is needed for a report. Once the radar recorder is taken down, it is connected to the laptop via Bluetooth to download the data it collected. Reports can then be produced using data needed for any particular project. For example, if a town wants to see how many vehicles exceed a certain speed on a selected road segment, the report will show the number traveling over the speed limit as well as the times when each data point was recorded. If a town wants information on the volume of traffic on a road, the report will include the times that traffic is heaviest on that road segment. Tables and graphs can easily be produced to accompany the raw data.

With this new radar recorder, the BCRC expects to be able to conduct more traffic studies in the region. The Commission currently is taking requests for speed studies and traffic counts for next spring, summer, and fall. If your municipality is interested in a study, please contact Allison Strohl at [astrohl@bcrcvt.org](mailto:astrohl@bcrcvt.org), or Jim Henderson at [jhenderson@bcrcvt.org](mailto:jhenderson@bcrcvt.org).



Jim Henderson sets up the BCRC's new radar recorder to collect traffic data on a town road.

## New Bicycle-Pedestrian Design Guidance from VTrans

VTrans published the [Pedestrian and Bicycle Design Manual](#) in 2002. At the time, it was considered a state of the art set of guidelines. A lot has happened in the almost two decades since then. FHWA has issued numerous planning and design resources to support more walking and bicycling, collaborative organizations like the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) have formed and issued nationally recognized guidance, a new MUTCD came out in 2009, and walking and bicycling has been incorporated into other planning and development activities.

With all of this great design guidance out there, the old manual has been retired, but since citizens, planners, and designers continue to need guidance as they work on projects that improve conditions for walking and bicycling, VTrans assembled a new web page that incorporates a comprehensive set of guidance, manuals, design details, and other resources to support walking and bicycling infrastructure projects. You can find this web resource here - <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/bike-ped/resources>, and can contact [Mark Anders](#) at the BCRC for more information about bicycle and pedestrian related infrastructure design.

## Guidance for Demonstration Projects in State Highway ROWs

VTrans is pleased to announce new guidance for municipalities, businesses, and community groups who wish to implement demonstration projects in state highway rights-of-way. The guidance and applications can be found on the Agency's [Permitting Services website](#), and is included below. Demonstration projects are a way for communities to evaluate the impact of a roadway change, such as to improve walking, bicycling, transit access, public spaces, and traffic flow, without making a permanent, and often expensive, investment. The guidance document describes the options available, issues that need to be considered, the state approval processes, and provides links to resources with additional information. It provides an orientation on the topic and is not a design guide or standard.

### [Guidance Document: Demonstration Projects in State Highway Right-of-Way](#)

#### [Demonstration Project Phase 1 Pre-Application](#)

Phase 1 Contact: Amy Bell, Planning Manager, [amy.bell@vermont.gov](mailto:amy.bell@vermont.gov), 802-279-0783

#### [Demonstration Project Phase 2 Section 1111 Permit Application Supplement](#)

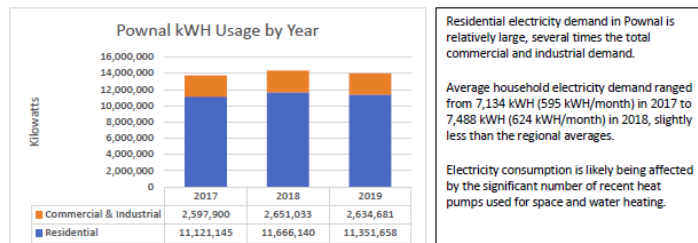
Phase 2 Contact: [Permitting Services](#)



Examples of demonstration projects from the new Guidance Document

## Summaries of Town Energy Data Available

Efficiency Vermont has provided an extensive database of municipal and regional energy data for use by regional planning commissions and local energy committees and planners. The data covers a wide range of topics, based on statistics that are collected as part of Efficiency Vermont's efforts to track success in promoting energy efficiency. The BCRC has extracted and summarized an initial set of data for each town in the region. This first set of summary sheets provides a regional overview and data about recent residential and commercial energy demand, electric vehicle registrations, and the number and type of energy efficiency incentives accessed by year. The data summaries can be accessed on the energy section of BCRC's website: <http://www.bcrct.org/energy-planning.html>.



Example of a graphical summary of town-level energy data.

## McCullough Library Service Supports Workforce Development

Through a grant from the Fund for North Bennington, the McCullough Library is offering free access to [www.Lynda.com](http://www.Lynda.com) through May 21, 2021, and will likely seek funding to renew this service. Lynda features more than 15,500 online courses and tutorials designed to help people improve their technology and business skills. Lynda interfaces with LinkedIn, so those who would like to feature skills they're developing to potential employers can do so very easily. This resource is also useful to those who would like to start their own business.

Residents of Bennington, North Bennington and Shaftsbury are all warmly encouraged to activate their McCullough Library membership and take advantage of this service. People can now activate their free memberships quickly and easily with this online form:



<https://forms.gle/ZzcafSmq3m2oLU6D6>

## Act 179 Housing Law will Effect Local Land Use Regulations

New legislation designed to improve access to housing took effect when the Governor signed it on October 12. Here's what the law stipulates:

Accessory dwelling unit changes, required provisions for municipal bylaws:

- Size expansion – must allow ADUs of at least 30% the size of the single-family dwelling or 900 square feet, whichever is greater.
  - Review options – must use same review that applies to single-family dwellings – i.e., no more conditional use review in districts where single-family dwellings are a permitted use.
- Short-term rental differentiation – can regulate short-term rentals distinctly from longer-term residential rentals.

Existing small lots: Currently, municipalities can prohibit development on extremely small, existing lots that are less than one-eighth acre or have a lot width or depth dimension less than 40 feet. The bill modifies this provision so that it does not apply to small lots that are served by and able to connect to municipal sewer and water service.

Conditional use character of the area standard for multiunit dwellings of four or less units: Such multi-unit dwellings may reviewed as a conditional use, but may not be denied solely due to an undue adverse effect on the character of the area.

Municipalities are granted authority to regulate short-term rentals by means of an ordinance or by-law. Definition of short-term rental includes, "... rented to the transient, traveling, or vacationing public for a period of fewer than 30 consecutive days and for more than 14 days per calendar year."

Take notice of the first three items concerning accessory dwelling units, existing small lot development, and conditional use review for multiunit dwellings. These new State provisions take precedence over any contradictory provisions in municipal zoning bylaws and are effective as of the date of signing (i.e., they are in effect now). Undoubtedly, this will impact allowances for accessory dwelling units (aka accessory apartments) in many municipalities. Next time you update your zoning, you'll want to make sure it complies with these statutory provisions. Until then, you'll need to go by the State statutory provisions.

## Events and Opportunities....

For COVID-19 related business, nonprofit, local government, and public assistance information, funding opportunities, and suggestions for donating to service organizations go to:

[BCRC COVID-19 Resource Directory](#)

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Restart Vermont Technical Assistance Program: This program is designed to connect businesses in need of technical assistance (legal, financial, architectural, web development/IT, etc.) with technical assistance providers. The TA providers will be paid for by grant funds the state has set aside using CARES Act funds. The BCRC is serving as the program navigator for the Bennington region. For more information, contact [Bill Colvin](#) at the BCRC or go to the program website:

<https://www.vermonteconomicdevelopment.com/> .

### Sustainable Energy Outreach Network's (Virtual) Sustainable Home Tour

On Saturday November 7th, from 10 – 11:30 am, SEON's 2020 Virtual Sustainable Home Tour will showcase 4 homes and the design/construction teams whose work demonstrates a commitment to high performance building, sustainable materials, durability, indoor air quality, and renewable energy. It's a "Show & Tell" opportunity to see how these homes look and feel. Learn about the technologies and processes that make these homes sustainable – including preserving the old! As you prepare for winter and the holidays, it's the perfect time to learn and refine key high performance approaches to new construction and renovation. Additional information can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/seonvt/>. Admission to the zoom meeting is free, but donations are greatly appreciated.



Vermont Residential Building Standards (RBES) Webinar: Tuesday - November 10 \* 4:00 to 5:00 PM  
This training, conducted by an Energy Code expert with Efficiency Vermont, will cover key updates from the previous RBES, the municipal role in energy code, and will touch on the importance of building envelope, mechanical, and ventilation system requirements. There will be time for questions with the presenter. The presentation is open to everyone and will be of particular value to municipal land use and building staff as well as architects, engineers, contractors, and other building industry professionals.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83855062685?pwd=elRsaXRsdDQ2YkItT2g2azNsbWxUJz09&from=addon>

Call in: +1 929 205 6099 Meeting ID: 838 5506 2685 Passcode: 039978

For more information, contact Jim Sullivan at the BCRC: [jsullivan@bcrcvt.org](mailto:jsullivan@bcrcvt.org).

Funders Roundtable \* November 13 from 12:00—100 PM: Join SVEP and a slew of funders to hear about what grants are currently available and what they're looking for in the applications. This event will be updated as funders are added to the agenda. This webinar is a primer to the [SVEP Grant Writing Workshop](#) which will be held November 18th, 19th, and 20th, 2020. If are not able to make this webinar, all webinars are recorded for you to watch at your convenience.

[Please register to receive the Zoom link](#)

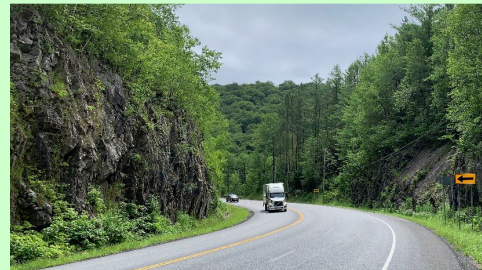
Transportation Alternatives Grants: VTrans is pleased to announce that they are now accepting grant applications for the SFY 2021 Transportation Alternatives Program. This year, Transportation Alternatives Program funding (roughly \$2.2 million) is available for all eligible activities as described in the ***Vermont Transportation Alternatives Fall 2020 Application Guide*** per the link below. *Applications are due in-hand or by e-mail by **Friday, November 27, 2020**.* Contact [Mark Anders](#) at the BCRC for more information about this program and for assistance with developing a grant.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/transport-alt>

Route 9 Corridor Stakeholders' Meeting: Thursday, December 3, 2020 \* 6:30pm – 8pm  
VTrans is working on a Corridor Management Plan for Route 9 between VT-279 in Bennington and I-91 in Brattleboro and is collecting information from businesses, residents, workers and travelers about needs and concerns along the roadway. VTrans will then consider all the needs and concerns so they can evaluate next steps and partnerships, identifying practical short-term projects as well as longer term projects. Pre-registration is not required, but would be appreciated to help us prepare for the logistics of running an online meeting. Please visit the [website](#) to register.

To request accommodations for accessibility or a translator, please contact Katharine Otto ([Katharine.otto@vermont.gov](mailto:Katharine.otto@vermont.gov), 802-917-3451) at least 5 business days ahead of the meeting.

For more information and to register, visit <https://bit.ly/3jNUUEY>



Vermont Better Roads Program: The Vermont Agency of Transportation is pleased to announce the 24th year of funding to support projects on municipal roads that improve water quality and result in maintenance cost savings. The grant funds are provided by the VT Agency of Transportation in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. The Vermont Better Roads Program promotes the use of erosion control and maintenance techniques that save money while protecting and enhancing water quality around the State. Applications will be accepted until December 18th, 2020. For the most up-to-date information or to download a copy of the application go to:

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/better-roads> or contact [Jim Henderson](#) at the BCRC.

#### BCRC Staff Emails

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