



Bennington County Regional Commission

# News and Notes

January 2017

## Meeting to Highlight Housing and Rivers Programs

The January meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission will include a presentation by [NeighborWorks of Western Vermont](#) (NWWVT) and an overview of important issues related to our rivers by staff of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held on Thursday, January 19, at **Bennington Project Independence** on Route 7A (614 Harwood Hill Road) in Bennington—[click](#) for directions.



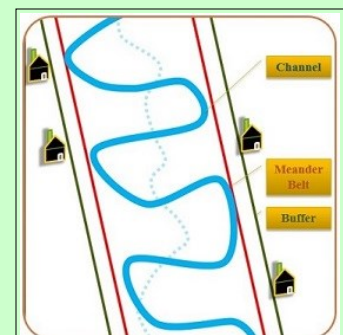
NWWVT provides a diverse array of homeownership and home improvement programs from its offices in West Rutland and, working with Shires Housing, has just established a local office in Bennington County. Ludy Biddle, executive director of NWWVT, said staff at her agency wanted to be able to provide more services by being centrally located with a permanent location in Bennington County. “We started providing services to Bennington County as early as 2004, I think, but always at a distance,” Biddle said.

A recently awarded community development grant will allow NWWVT to run a pilot program that would improve the physical condition of rental housing units in Bennington through permanent staff in the town. The grant will fund the first year of the pilot project. NWWVT staff will present information about programs and opportunities available through the organization.

The second portion of the meeting will include a discussion with river management engineers from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. Important information for towns covering responses and procedures implementing emergency protective measures in the wake of severe weather events will be reviewed. The Department’s “Rivers and Roads” training program and workshop schedule for the coming year also will be reviewed.

An understanding of “river corridors” underpins much of the work carried out through the Department’s Rivers Program. Municipalities are encouraged but not required to protect river corridors and those which do are eligible for incentives including the highest rate available through the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund. River Corridor Maps can be viewed on the [Vermont Natural Resources Atlas](#) or on the [Flood Ready Atlas](#). The River Corridor data are labeled by date and will be periodically updated to incorporate available stream geomorphic data.

A light meal will be provided free of charge at 5:30, followed by a brief business meeting, and these two presentations. Please contact Jim Sullivan at the BCRC for more information: [jsullivan@bcrcvt.org](mailto:jsullivan@bcrcvt.org).



Rivers meander within corridors; changing courses can threaten public infrastructure and private property.

## Understanding the Expansion of the HUBZone Program in Vermont

The HUBZone Program assists small businesses gain preferential access to federal contracts when they qualify and are located in a geographic area that has been designated as HUBZone. In Vermont; Addison, Bennington, Orange, Rutland, Windsor & Windham counties have recently been named as qualified HUBZone areas.

The Vermont Procurement Technical Assistance Center and the U.S. Small Business Administration will be holding workshops in the newly affected counties to educate the business community on what is required for qualification and the process of getting certified. A workshop will be held in Bennington on January 10 from 1:00-2:30pm at the Lightning Jar, 194 North Street.

Register for this free workshop at: <http://vtptac.ecenterdirect.com/events>

Specific topics covered at the workshop will include:

- ◆ Overview of the HUBZone Program
- ◆ Benefits of being HUBZone certified
- ◆ Eligibility requirements
- ◆ Certification process



## New Internship Program to Begin in 2017

The Bennington Comprehensive Internship Program (BCIP) is a unique and exciting opportunity for local businesses and the entire Bennington community. An assessment conducted by the BCRC discovered something that many Benningtonians already knew: while businesses struggle to find employees, local workers struggle to find a job. One reason is that workers often lack the skills local businesses are looking for in employees.

A well-designed internship program presents one way to address this disconnect. Internships provide employers the opportunity to teach needed skill sets and can lead to a supply of new employees. However, BCRC's studies also indicate that employers often struggle to find ways to most effectively train and deploy interns.

The BCIP aims to solve these problems through three strategies. BCIP will provide coaching for employers through the internship process, from developing an internship project to supervisory roles and evaluation. BCIP also will match interns participating in the program to a mentor from the community. And finally, BCIP will pay for interns to attend workshops and trainings outside of the workplace that will enable them to succeed in their chosen field.

As BCIP launches its pilot program, it seeks business partners (especially those that have been reluctant to host interns or have had frustrating experiences in the past). Businesses who work with BCIP will receive help with recruitment, screening applicants, project development, and ongoing management of interns. Duration, compensation, and hours of the internship will be determined by the employer.

BCIP is made possible through a Regional Workforce Partnership grant from the Vermont Department of Labor and a partnership of BCIC, BCRC, and The Lightning Jar. For more information, contact [Michelle Marrocco](#) at the BCRC.



## SoVermont Economy Project

An Economic & Workforce Development Network

The [Southern Vermont Economy Project](#) (SVEP) seek to stabilize, improve and expand **the rural economic and workforce development network** in Southern Vermont. The [Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation](#) (BDCC) applied for a [USDA RCDI](#) grant to facilitate this project. Over the next two years SVEP will connect and expand collaboration for economic and community development work in the [Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone](#).

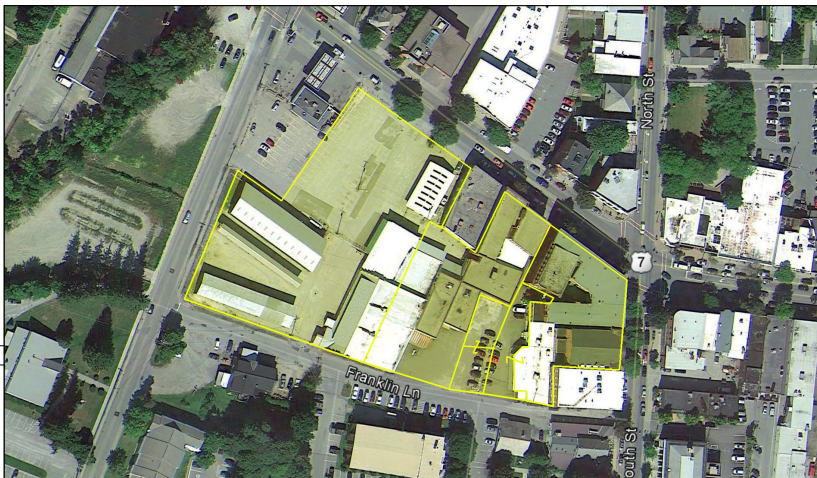
To grow a more resilient region the Southern Vermont Economy Project will:

- Strengthen economic collaboration,
- Improve access to economic & workforce development information, programs, services, technical assistance, best practices training and funding initiatives,
- Bolster economic & workforce development services in Windham and Bennington Counties,
- Improve the capacity of participant organizations to work individually and collectively on the Southern Vermont economy.

For more information and to get involved, contact: Santina "Sunny" Leporati, Southern Vermont Economy Project Manager - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation 802-257-7731 ext. 222 \* 802-681-5616 (Cell) \* [sleporati@brattleborodevelopment.com](mailto:sleporati@brattleborodevelopment.com) .

## Putnam Block Redevelopment Efforts Continue

BCRC Community Development Director, [Bill Colvin](#), recently provided the Bennington Select Board with an update on the Putnam Block redevelopment project. The Bennington Redevelopment Group (BRG) is completing its due diligence on the property following review of an initial environmental assessment. Transfer of the property to BRG could take place in January of 2017.



Site of the proposed redevelopment project in the heart of downtown Bennington.

The Town of Bennington will be asked to take certain actions in support of the redevelopment project. For example, applications by the town to two grant programs could provide a total of \$1.25 million to partially fund the demolition, asbestos abatement, environmental remediation, and historic building renovation components of the project. To raise the \$2-\$2.5 million needed for the public infrastructure necessary for a mixed-use project of this size, BRG is likely to ask the Town to support the creation of a

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. TIFs allow municipalities to issue a bond to raise the revenue for a project in the short term, and repay the bond over time through increased tax revenue.

## SHIRES FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Co-hosted by BCIC, BCRC, and the Shires RMO, a Shires Summit Follow-Up was held on November 30 at the Park House in Manchester. The Manchester venue was chosen to underscore the regional organization's commitment to their work in the Northshire, and to highlight the coordinated work of the BCIC and BCRC in leading regional economic development efforts in the county. The nearly 40 guests included municipal officials, business leaders, retailers, non-profit administrators, and community leaders.

The meeting addressed three points: the broad range of ongoing economic development initiatives and partnerships in the Bennington County region, ranging from downtown redevelopment projects to work on local food systems economies; the rationale for a Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) it calls for; and the necessity of public input to steer that process. To emphasize that final point, the attendees spent the latter half of the two-hour meeting in one of two working groups. One group addressed issues pertaining to regional marketing, while the other focused on regional economic development. Ideas discussed at the marketing table included a region-wide area guide to attractions and amenities in and around Bennington County. The economic development group identified the need for a simple, compelling "one-pager" statement that would enable those at the table to build public support for the process, and encourage increased participation.



BCRC Economic Development Specialist, [Jonathan Cooper](#), facilitating discussion at the Shires Economy meeting.

## BCIC ANNUAL MEETING

The Bennington County Industrial Corporation's (BCIC's) Annual Meeting was held on November 16th at the Bennington Museum, where approximately 40 attendees gathered for a social and networking hour before sitting down for the business meeting. Featuring a keynote address from Wayne Granquist, Chair of the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone Committee, the Annual Meeting was sponsored by local businesses TD Bank, Southwestern Vermont Health Care, Bennington College, and Global-Z International.

BCIC President Dixie Zens focused his report on the previous year's organizational transitions, observing that the new relationship between BCIC and BCRC has improved BCIC's efficiency while maintaining its independence as an organization. Bill Colvin and Jonathan Cooper of BCRC incorporated the transition theme into the Director's Report, identifying a shift away from economic development efforts that focus on bringing external assets to a region, and toward an "economic gardening" approach that supports the development of local assets. Jeannie Jenkins provided an overview of numerous initiatives undertaken by the BCIC's Workforce and Education Committee to develop the local workforce.

In his keynote remarks, Wayne Granquist observed that through the 1990s, state-level economic development programs were focused on delivering incentives to local companies, but that such inducements are only be one tool in the toolkit. The challenge lies in creating an environment for coordinated and meaningful regional economic development and described the CEDS process embedded in the concept of the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone as a key opportunity that needs to be acted on now.





## Regional Food System Study Advances

This winter, The USDA *Rural Development Business Grant* funded food system study of Bennington will continue its research and interview process. The BCRC is partnering with Liz Ruffa and Northshire Grows, a project of [Food Connects](#), to assess farm viability and food access issues in the greater Bennington area. Ken Meter from [Crossroads Resource Council](#) and Rosalie Wilson, a farm and food business development specialist based in Norwich, VT, are assisting with this work. Look for information about public input meetings in February and for a presentation of the study's findings this spring. Northshire Grows is applying for a second year of funding for market assessment work throughout Bennington County, with an eye toward partnerships in Windham County. Year Three will focus on developing the “enterprise” that this study is exploring.

In other food system related work, Liz Ruffa has been appointed Local Food And Agriculture Commissioner for the BCRC. Additionally, a Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union Farm to School professional development course is being offered to area teachers, administrators and food service staff. All area K-12 schools are welcome to participate! This course will be held, starting in February, at the MAU Middle School. Contact [Liz@foodconnects.org](mailto:Liz@foodconnects.org) for more information.

## BCRC Study Explores Potential for Downtown Food Market

The BCRC initiated a study, funded through VHCB’s Farm and Forest Viability Program, to assess the opportunity for a new small-footprint grocery store in downtown Bennington. The project consultant, Kitchen Table Consultants (KTC), studied the town’s current business landscape, economic trends, history, vision, and plans for the future. The local market was surveyed to determine the level of satisfaction with the current grocery supply and the level of demand for a new grocery outlet.

KTC found a clear opportunity for a small downtown grocery store in a town on the verge of blossoming re-development. With some major new development projects underway, the study concluded that it is an ideal time to take advantage of this opportunity and play a key part in Bennington’s revitalization.

Key opportunities exist to expand business and grow with this historic Vermont community as new development projects begin to take shape, and to take advantage of opportunities to benefit from significant tax incentives while meeting a clear consumer demand. The study concludes that there



exists strong potential to bring specialized and local products to a receptive market.

The market may be integrated into the Putnam Block redevelopment. Its location in the center of the downtown will help spur other business development while addressing a longstanding need for an outlet for healthy food in the walkable center of the community.



## Municipal Planning Grants Announced

The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development recently announced \$464,000 in Municipal Planning Grant awards to 38 communities across Vermont. This year's Municipal Planning Grants range from \$3,159 to \$20,000 with total requests exceeding \$780,000. Competitively awarded, 69 total applications were reviewed with 38 projects selected throughout Vermont. "These grants support diverse, locally-driven projects that address a range of issues from housing and economic development to steps that reduce future flood damages," said Josh Hanford, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development.

In the BCRC Region, funds were awarded for projects in Manchester and Bennington. Manchester will use \$25,000 in grant and local funds to hire a consultant to conduct a charrette and create a physical master plan for downtown, including its designated village center, that integrates prior planning and illustrates an inspirational, shared community vision for the future. Bennington's \$8,000 project involves a transportation infrastructure study that will focus on barriers to walking and bicycling in an area within that community's Designated Growth Center. The study will identify problems and recommend short and long term solutions.

## Ninja Bicycle Path Update

The BCRC provided planning and project management for the first phase of the Ninja Bicycle Path that opened this fall. The new twelve-foot wide paved path links the Bennington College entrance on VT67A to Hannaford Plaza and includes a pedestrian refuge island and other safety improvements to the VT67A/Matteson Rd./Silk Rd./College Drive intersection. The intersection is listed as a VTrans High Crash Location (HCL) with 16 crashes and 8 injuries between 2010-2014. The project has improved sight distance for vehicles exiting Silk Road, made it safer for pedestrians and cyclists crossing VT67A, and calmed traffic, making the intersection safer for all. The Town's long-term goal is to install a roundabout at the intersection.

Phase II will be a primitive dirt path linking the end of the new paved path to Morse Road. This will allow path users to reach downtown Bennington without traveling on Northside Drive while Phase III, the paved path, is designed, permitted, and constructed. The Town and BCRC recently acquired all property owner permissions and permits necessary to construct Phase II, and we hope to have it open in the spring.



*The recently constructed Ninja Bicycle Path Phase I along VT67A in Bennington*



## News from the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance

The Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance (BCSWA) represents the Towns of Arlington, Bennington, Dorset, Glastenbury, Manchester, Pownal, Rupert, Sandgate, Searsburg, Shaftsbury, Stamford, Sunderland and Woodford, with a total, combined population of just over 35,000 people. The Alliance completed and adopted a solid waste implementation plan (or "SWIP") in December of 2015. The mission of Alliance "...is to reduce the amount of waste disposed in landfills, by incineration or similar means by reducing the amount of waste generated, conserving resources and promoting recycling and reuse." You can read our SWIP by visiting <http://www.bcswavt.org/about-us/>.



**Fall Activities:** This past fall, the Alliance held a household hazardous waste (HHW) event for residents of the 13 towns at the Dorset School in Dorset. The Alliance will hold the next household hazardous waste event for residents and small businesses on Saturday, May 13, 2017 at the Bennington Transfer Station. Details will be posted at the Alliance website at [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org). The Alliance now has a Facebook page as well as the website, so follow us on Facebook for periodic ideas on how to recycle.

**Paint:** You don't have to wait for our household hazardous waste events to dispose of latex and oil based paint. Visit our website, or [www.paintcare.com](http://www.paintcare.com) to find locations that will accept used paint for FREE!.



**Outreach:** The Alliance also continued outreach to schools and businesses, working with both the Northeast Resource Recovery Association (NRRRA) and the Northeast Recycling Council (NERC). After contacting all 25 schools and 300 of our businesses, the Alliance provided on-site assistance to three schools and 80 businesses. We are planning a business workshop this spring (2017) in partnership with the Bennington Chamber of Commerce. If your school, business or institution is interested in having someone visit to discuss better ways to handle solid waste, organics, recyclables and other materials, please contact Michael Batcher at 802-442-0713 x 2 or [mbatcher@bcrcvt.org](mailto:mbatcher@bcrcvt.org).

**Funding and Grants:** Most of the funding for the Alliance comes from the member towns. This year the Alliance applied for and received over \$28,000 in grants from the Agency of Natural Resources for business outreach and for household hazardous waste events. The Agency of Agriculture and Markets provided \$4,400 for pesticide collection at HHW events. We also teamed up with the Windham County Solid Waste Management District and the Londonderry Group to bring on an Eco AmeriCorps member to help with outreach and education.

**call2recycle® Batteries and Fluorescent Bulbs and Paint:** Many retail stores are accepting alkaline and rechargeable batteries, fluorescent bulbs, including both tubes and CFLs for FREE! Visit [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org) or <http://www.call2recycle.org/what-can-i-recycle/> to find those establishments.

**Wondering How to Recycle?** Visit [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org) and look at our Programs and Projects drop down. The A to Z list provides ideas on how to recycle and dispose of a number of items. There is also information on composting, donating clothing (textiles), construction and demolition debris, biosolids and disposing of prescription drugs. Talk to your hauler about recycling and how you may be able to save money by disposing of materials properly. Check with your town hall to find out how you can access your town transfer station and what materials they accept.

**Compost Bin Sales and Workshop:** Interested in composting in your backyard and learning more about composting? The Alliance will be selling both backyard compost bins and kitchen compost pails in early 2017. The latter will come in handy when transfer stations in the area begin accepting food scraps on July 1, 2017. We should have an announcement on our website and Facebook pages in early 2017 with more details.



**Need More Information?** Visit the Alliance website at [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org) or contact Michael Batcher at 802-442-0713 x 2 or [mbatcher@bcrcvt.org](mailto:mbatcher@bcrcvt.org).

## Municipal Parcel Mapping and Geographic Tools Available from the Agency of Natural Resources

Having comparable land parcel data is critical for making decisions about how we use, protect, and manage wildlife, river corridors, forests, and more. But right now, parcel data across Vermont towns exist in mismatched formats--or doesn't exist at all digitally--making it extremely difficult to look at project impacts or planning from a multi-town or regional level.

Leslie Pelch of the Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI) explains how a new Statewide Parcel Mapping program that is working on solving this issue and creating a consistent parcel dataset available to towns, the State, and the public. [Click to read more...](#)

Here are several more useful resource planning tools available for local and regional planners:

**Trail Finder :** One mapping tool that brings together trail data from a multiple trail networks, organizations, and crowd-sourced platforms in Vermont and New Hampshire. Funded by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, & Recreation and other partners. [Open map.](#)

**Materials Management Map:** Doing research on where food scraps are generated most in Vermont? Need to find a transfer station or composting facility? The Materials Management Map highlights these facilities and more. [Open map.](#)

**Public Combined Sewer Overflow Discharge Notifications:** Launched in July 2016, this notification system allows subscribers to receive e-mail or text notifications (or both) within 1-hour of a discharge of stormwater and/or sewage into public waters from a public wastewater collection system. [More info.](#)

**Flood Ready Atlas:** After Tropical Storm Irene, multiple state agencies--including the Agency of Natural Resources--came together to create a data and mapping resource for flood resilience planning. [Open map.](#)

**Have feedback on how the Agency makes data and mapping applications available?** Drop a note! E-mail digital mapping gurus [Erik Engstrom](#) or [Ryan Knox](#), or call the Agency's Central Office at (802) 828-1294.

### Events and Opportunities.....

**Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund:** The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) provides low interest loans to municipalities and privately-owned public water systems for planning, final design and construction of water system improvements that protect public health and facilitate compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The Drinking Water Project Priority List (PPL) is adopted each year to identify drinking water projects qualifying for available funding through the DWSRF Program. All projects seeking funding for construction from 10/1/2017 through 10/1/2019 must be on the adopted priority list to receive funding. Applying to be on the priority list is not applying for a loan and does not guarantee a loan. The [priority list application](#) is to be filled out annually and once completed, emailed to [Ashley Lucht](#). **Applications are due by Wednesday February 15, 2017.**

It is strongly recommended that any project anticipating construction during the FY17 PPL funding cycle apply for a [Planning Loan](#) to ensure readiness-to-proceed criteria is met.

For more information on this program and other funding opportunities administered by the Water Infrastructure Financing Programs, please refer to this [factsheet](#). If you have questions regarding the draft IUP or have general loan program questions, please contact Ashley Lucht at 802 585 4904 or by [email](#).



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**Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund:** The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) provides low interest loans to municipalities for planning, final design and construction of wastewater and stormwater system improvements that protect public health. All projects seeking funding for construction from 10/1/2017 through 10/1/2019 must be on the adopted priority list to receive funding. Applying to be on the priority list is not applying for a loan and does not guarantee a loan. **Applications are due by Wednesday, February 15, 2017.**

Example Clean Water projects include wastewater collection system and treatment facility construction, upgrade, or refurbishment projects; combined sewer overflow (CSO) elimination; stormwater treatment; water and energy efficiency or environmental innovation; and community decentralized wastewater disposal systems. For more information on this program and other funding opportunities administered by the Water Infrastructure Financing Programs, please refer to our [factsheet](#). If you have questions regarding the draft IUP or have general loan program questions, please contact Terisa Thomas at 802 249 2413 or by email at [terisa.thomas@vermont.gov](mailto:terisa.thomas@vermont.gov).

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**Adobe Creative Suites Workshops:** Many local organizations and businesses increasingly rely on Adobe Creative Suite programs such as [Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign](#) to produce reports, presentations and flyers that meet high standards of graphic appeal and legibility. The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) is collaborating with CCV - Bennington to develop [special workforce-rate workshops](#) in Adobe Creative Suite programs to enhance local technical capacity to meet this demand. Workshops will include access to computers with the Adobe programs and will be designed to meet the specific interests of students that register. Please take the following survey if you are interested in learning more about these programs, which are planned to begin in the [spring of 2017](#). [Interest in Adobe Creative Suite Workshops Survey](#) .

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**Hub Zone Workshop—see page 2 for details:** January 10, 2017, 1:00-2:30pm at the Lightning Jar, 194 North Street in Bennington

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**BCRC January Meeting (see page 1 for details)** - NeighborWorks Housing Programs and Information from the DEC Rivers Program for Municipalities. Thursday, January 19, 5:30 PM at Bennington Project Independence, Route 7A, Bennington.

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**BCRC Annual Meeting - Celebrating 50 Years of Service to the Towns and Villages of our Region. Thursday, May 18, 2017. Location to be Announced. Save the date for this special evening! More details coming soon.**