



Bennington County Regional Commission

# *News and Notes*

*March 2017*

## **Meeting to Highlight Economic Development and Housing Programs**

The March meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission will include a presentation on best practices for facilitating economic development in villages and downtowns, an introduction to programs offered by [NeighborWorks of Western Vermont](#) (NWWVT), and the first of two public hearings on a proposed (energy plan) amendment to the Bennington County Regional Plan. The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held on **Thursday, March 16, at the Park House at the Dana Thompson Recreation Center in Manchester.** [Click for directions.](#)

The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development has developed a comprehensive overview of tools and techniques available to support economic development in downtowns and villages. Among the factors that need to be addressed to support business growth and diverse, active municipal centers are financing for development and growth, provision of infrastructure adequate to sustain economic drivers, and a diverse and skilled workforce. Each community will have a different need and focus in each area. [Bill Colvin](#), BCRC's coordinator of regional community and economic development, will facilitate the discussion and provide relevant local examples.



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 proposed regional energy plan has been the subject of several recent public meetings. Comments received have been incorporated into the plan and after this hearing and a second hearing on March 23, commissioners may vote to adopt the plan as an amendment to the comprehensive Regional Plan.

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).

## State Housing Report Released

In 2016, recognizing the increasing lack of housing affordable to those who earn too much to qualify for state or federal assistance, the General Assembly identified a need for investigating methods that would encourage the development of middle income housing. To that end, Act 157 of 2016 included a call for the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) to work with stakeholders to recommend possible solutions.



The resulting study, including recommendations, is now complete and available for review at the Department's website: [Act 157 Housing Study](#).

One key finding contained in the report is that public incentives are critical to improve the quality and quantity of housing and finance repairs to sidewalks, roads, sewer and water systems that support new development. Tools like tax credits and tax increment financing also can be effective in supporting housing development and the infrastructure needed for such growth. Regulatory incentives, such as the Priority Housing Project exemption from Act 250 permitting may be helpful as well, as can be seen from instances where it has facilitated the development of more than 200 housing units in the state by saving an estimated average of six months from state permitting timelines and more than \$250,000 in permit fees.

## New Look Website for the Vermont Community Development Association



The **Vermont Community Development Association** is pleased to announce the launch of its new website! When you visit them at [www.vtcda.org](http://www.vtcda.org), you will find an updated, clean web interface where you can easily find the information you're looking for. In addition to information about VCDA's history, mission, and work, highlights of the new website include:

- ◆ Information about upcoming and past VCDA conferences, including agendas, presentations, and other meeting materials.
- ◆ Details on VCDA's 2017 spring conference, "Blazing A Trail: The Economic Impact and Future of Vermont's Trails and Recreation Paths" including online registration.
- ◆ An online contact form where you can easily send questions and comments.

In the future, VCDA the website will include online sign up, renewal, and payment for memberships.

## Planning Atlas Offers Information for Towns and Villages

A new online atlas developed by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development provides a wealth of information about such things as boundaries of state designated downtowns and village centers, which municipalities have zoning regulations, cultural and natural resources, and more. In addition to the interactive map, the tool includes the municipal planning database that provides data on local land use regulation and policies. You can find the Planning Atlas [here](#).

## VTrans Bicycle Plan—Roadway Characteristics Survey

The Vermont Agency of Transportation would like to know which roadway characteristics you feel are most important for providing a level of comfort while bicycling on Vermont's State roadways? Wide shoulders? Low traffic volumes? Do the characteristics that provide comfort change in a rural context versus village centers?

Take the on-line VTrans On-Road Bicycle Plan Phase II

### [ROADWAY CHARACTERISTICS SURVEY](#)

to have input in the process and help determining roadway investment priorities.

As part of the planning process, the survey will inform the final evaluation criteria used to assess the comfort level of [high-use/priority bicycle corridors](#). The survey closes March 10, 2017. For more information visit the project webpage at <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/bikeplan>. And subscribe to [vermontbike@gmail.com](mailto:vermontbike@gmail.com) for project updates.

If you have questions or comments related to this project, please contact VTrans Planning Coordinator: Sommer Bucossi at 802-828-3884 or email [vermontbike@gmail.com](mailto:vermontbike@gmail.com).



## Sunderland and Sandgate Stormwater Planning

The BCRC recently received a \$48,000 Ecosystem Restoration Grant to prepare Stormwater Master Plans for the towns of Sunderland and Sandgate. Fitzgerald Environmental Associates (FEA, based in Colchester, Vermont, has been contracted to assist the Commission in the development of the master plans. These Stormwater Master Plans will identify, map, evaluate, and prioritize sites requiring improvements to manage runoff and mitigate impacts. The plans also provide a framework for the town highway departments to identify specific projects and costs through preparation of five year capital improvement plans.

With the passage of The Clean Water Act came the requirement that all municipalities develop a Municipal Road General permit to be adopted in 2018 and implemented over a five year period. The Municipal Road General Permit will require towns to inventory culverts and drainage ditches and perform erosion risk analysis on all roads with connectivity to surface waters and wetlands. The BCRC currently is mapping stormwater infrastructure in the towns and will provide this data to FEA. These Stormwater Master Plans will form the initial framework of the Municipal Road General Permits.



Erosion and deposition along edge of road.



Exposed and damaged culvert.

## Local Emergency Operations Plans Due Before May 1

Local Emergency Operations Plans (**LEOP**) need to be updated and approved by municipal legislative bodies between Town Meeting Day and May 1, 2017. The template and format will remain the same as last year and can be used as the basis for this year's update. There will be an additional, optional annex related to continuity of operations planning (known as "COOP"). With or without a LEOP, this is a very useful concept to consider - how you would keep your local government operations running in case of incident or emergency, whether a cyberattack, server crash, severe illness among key staff, water or wastewater plant failure, or other unexpected event.

Please remember that having an updated, adopted LEOP is a prerequisite for certain State grants and funding programs. LEOPs must also be certified and signed by a Town Manager/Administrator, Town Selectboard Chair, or Village Trustees President, and that person must have taken either ICS 100 or 402. ICS 100 can be taken online and you can contact [Allison Strohl](#) at the BCRC, for further information, or for assistance with updating your LEOP.

## Counter Tools, Tobacco Retailers and Density

Retail outlet density contributes to the health and wellness of a town and community. Bennington County has the second highest adult tobacco use rate in the state. In the Northshire, 43% of high school students report ever using an electronic vape product as compared the state high school usage rate of 30% (YRBS 2015). 70% of youth go to a convenience store at least once a week ([counterbalancevt.com](#)). Substance use prevention engages multiple layers of tools and resources and density and policy is one such tool. Density comes in three forms: population based, number of retail outlets and geographic location.

Three years ago the VT Department of Health engaged substance use prevention coalitions to conduct a statewide audit of retail licensees holding a tobacco and/or alcohol license. The audit focused on healthy food choices including fruits, vegetables and dairy; alcohol products and related displays; tobacco products and related displays, products, and pricing.

The audit resulted in an interactive database called Counter Tools. Counter Tools allows users to extrapolate and integrate information into density and proximity reports related to the number of licensed tobacco retailers in a town. Counter Tools can map information and create visuals showing retailers' proximity to youth serving organizations such as schools and parks, exemplify the number of retail outlets in the town and how many are in proximity to youth serving organizations or within close proximity to each other. The data reports can be overlaid with town demographics.

The Town of Manchester recently passed a Commerce Ordinance prohibiting the sale of paraphernalia products within 1,000 feet of a school or childcare facility. The Selectboard invited The Collaborative to inform the board on best practices related to location of paraphernalia retail stores and area youth use rates. For more information about Counter Tools and available reports and information, contact Victoria Silsby, at 802-824-4200 or [victoria@thecollaborative.us](mailto:victoria@thecollaborative.us).





## Events and Opportunities.....

### **VT Council on Rural Development - Climate Economy Model Communities Program**

Two towns will be selected for an intensive Climate Economy organizing process for 2017. This program, developed through recommendations from the Vermont Climate Change Economy Council and Climate Economy Summit Convening of over 400 Vermonters, provides a great opportunity to act locally to model state-of-the-art rural development in a time of climate change. Eligibility details and the application to participate can be found here: [vtrural.org/model-communities](http://vtrural.org/model-communities). A webinar to learn more about this program and to ask questions will be held on **March 9 from 12:00 to 1:00 pm** at this site: <https://vcrd.clickmeeting.com/modelcommunities>.

### **Solid Waste Alliance Public Meeting - March 15**

The Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, March 15, from 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the Arlington Town Hall, 3828 VT Route 7A, Arlington. The purpose of the meeting is to review the progress to date on the 2016 –2017 work plan, plan for the upcoming household hazardous waste event and compost sales, and to offer members of the public an opportunity to discuss programs and activities of the Alliance with the Alliance board. The mission of the 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. The Alliance consists of the towns of Arlington, Bennington, Dorset, Glastenbury, Manchester, Pownal, Rupert, Sandgate, Searsburg, Shaftsbury, Stamford, Sunderland and Woodford. For more information, please visit [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org) or contact Michael S. Batcher at (802) 442-0713 x 2 or [mbatcher@bcrcvt.org](mailto:mbatcher@bcrcvt.org).

### **Grow Grants from NEGEF - Due March 15**

The [New England Grassroots Environment Fund](#) is offering Grow Grants of up to \$3,500 for community sustainability initiatives across New England. The Grassroots Fund supports groups that are creating and maintaining healthy, just, and environmentally sustainable communities. Groups working in energy & climate, local food, environmental health, land & water, or new economy that are building community and align with the Grassroots Fund's [Guiding Values](#) are welcome to apply. Applications from energy committees and groups are encouraged. Groups may apply for a variety of different projects including education and outreach materials, trainings and events, coordination, or other activities to support local energy action. To learn more about the types of energy projects that the Grassroots Fund supports check out the [Project Map](#), [Feature Stories](#), or [PEP Talk Videos](#). Contact Leigh Cameron at [Leigh@grassrootsfund.org](mailto:Leigh@grassrootsfund.org) or 603-905-9915 for more information.

### **Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Letter of Interest Due March 15**

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets is pleased to announce the availability of grant funds for the purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of Vermont specialty crops, defined as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture crops, honey, hops, maple syrup, and nursery crops (including Christmas trees and floriculture). These funds are awarded through a competitive review process guided by industry, nonprofit and government stakeholders. Prospective applicants may download the Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) Request for Proposals on the Agency's website at <http://bit.ly/vtscbgbp>.

### **BCRC Regular Meeting and Public Hearing - March 16**

Topics include: first public hearing to consider adoption of the new regional energy plan as an amendment to the Regional Plan, a workshop on economic development tools for downtowns and villages, and NeighborWorks of Western Vermont. See page 1 for details. Contact: [Jim Sullivan](#) at the BCRC.

**FY2018 Vermont Better Roads Grant Program - Due by 5pm on Friday March 17**

The Vermont Agency of Transportation is pleased to announce the 20th year of funding to support projects on municipal roads that improve water quality and result in maintenance cost savings. The Vermont Better Roads Program's goal is to promote the use of erosion control and maintenance techniques that save money while protecting and enhancing Vermont's lakes and streams. Funds, subject to availability, will be distributed as grants to municipalities to address town erosion problems. Please contact [Jim Henderson](mailto:Jim.Henderson@vt.gov) at the BCRC, or coordinators Alan May at (802) 828-4585 ([alan.may@vermont.gov](mailto:alan.may@vermont.gov)) or Linda Blasch at (802) 498-7216 ([linda.blasch@vermont.gov](mailto:linda.blasch@vermont.gov)), if you have any questions. The application may be downloaded at the following address:  
<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/better-roads>.

**Energy Grants for Nonprofits - Due March 17**

[Efficiency Vermont](http://www.veic.org) is soliciting proposals from nonprofit organizations to receive grants that will enable them to help low-income Vermonters reduce their energy bills. Under the [Vermont Community Energy Partnership Grant Program](http://www.veic.org), non-profit organizations that have on-going relationships with low-income Vermonters are encouraged to submit applications for projects that will help low-income Vermonters: (1) achieve energy savings through the direct installation of energy efficient products; (2) identify energy-saving opportunities in low-income households; and (3) increase their energy awareness. Efficiency Vermont expects to award between 5-10 proposals in the range of \$10,000 - \$30,000 each. Please find the link to the Request-for-Proposal on the VEIC's website at [this link](http://www.veic.org).

**Solid Waste, Recycling, and Composting Workshop for Businesses - March 21**

The Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance will be sponsoring a FREE workshop for businesses on methods of managing solid waste, the requirements of the Universal Recycling Law, and organics management, among other topics on Tuesday, March 21 from 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM at the A. Luke Crispe Room at the Vermont Veteran's Home, 325 North St., Bennington. The event is being cosponsored by the Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce and the Northeast Recycling Council. Please visit <http://www.bcswavt.org/event/materials-management-new-way-look-waste/> for more details.



We ask that attendees register either with Michael Batchter at [mbatchter@bcrcvt.org](mailto:mbatchter@bcrcvt.org) or Athena Bradley at [athena@nerc.org](mailto:athena@nerc.org).

**Bennington County Regional Plan Amendment Public Hearing - March 23**

The second public hearing on the proposed Regional Plan amendment involving incorporation of an updated energy plan. The hearing will be held at the BCRC offices at 4:00 PM on Thursday, March 23. Adoption vote of commissioners by ballot will follow the meeting. For more information, contact Jim Sullivan at the BCRC: [jsullivan@bcrcvt.org](mailto:jsullivan@bcrcvt.org) or 802-442-0713 x5.

**EPA Healthy Communities Grants - Initial Proposal Due April 7**

The Healthy Communities Grant Program is EPA New England's main grant program to work directly with communities to reduce environmental risks in order to protect and improve human health and the quality of life, advance resilience, and preserve/restore important ecosystems. EPA plans to award approximately 10 cooperative agreements, each up to a maximum of \$25,000. To qualify as an eligible project under the Healthy Communities Grant Program, proposed projects must: (1) be located in and/or directly benefit one or more of the Target Investment Areas; and (2) identify how the proposed project will achieve measurable environmental and/or public health results in one or more of the Target Program Areas. In 2017, Target Investment Areas include: Areas Needing to Create Community

Resilience, Environmental Justice Areas of Potential Concern, and/or Sensitive Populations. Target Program Areas include: Clean, Green, and Healthy Schools; Community and Water Infrastructure Resilience; Energy Efficiency; Healthy Indoor Environments; Healthy Outdoor Environments; and/or Tribal Youth Environmental Programs. A description of these target areas can be found in the 2017 Application Guidance at <https://www3.epa.gov/region1/eco/uep/pdfs/HC2017RFP.pdf>. For more information, contact Sandra Brownell at 617-918-1797 or [brownell.sandra@epa.gov](mailto:brownell.sandra@epa.gov).

#### **LEAP Energy Fair - April 8**

The 2017 LEAP Energy Fair is Saturday, April 8, 2017 from 9 AM - 3 PM. This event is FREE and is located at the Crossett Brook Middle School Gym, Duxbury, VT (5672 VT Route 100). Tour 75 exhibits and talk with dozens of experts about solar power, heat pumps, weatherization, energy audits, geothermal, biomass, pellet stoves, electric vehicles, and much more. You can learn how to reduce fuel bills, save energy and shrink emissions. Kids can enjoy a free show by Marko the Magician at 11AM. There will also be free electronic recycling, onsite, food and refreshments served onsite and free ice cream! Hosted by the volunteers of Waterbury LEAP. Visit [www.waterburyleap.org](http://www.waterburyleap.org) for more details.

#### **Caring for Canopy Grants - Due April 14**

Caring for Canopy grants are for projects focused on helping a community move their tree management program toward a sustained level and could include street and park tree inventories; management, protection, and streetscape plan development; public policy development; training opportunities for staff and volunteers; tree planting; and tree maintenance. Grants range from \$500 to \$5,000 and require a 50–50 match; total project cost range at least \$1,000–\$10,000. [Click here](#) for program and application information.

#### **Biomass Heating Conference and Expo - April 25-27**

The 2017 Conference & Expo will be held April 25-27 at the Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center in Burlington, VT. What started as “Heating the Northeast” in 2009 has now grown into the Northeast Biomass Heating Expo, with over 2,000 individual attendees and 400 businesses, agencies, and organizations represented. Of particular interest is the FREE Biomass 101 Workshop on April 25<sup>th</sup> from 3:45 – 5:00pm followed by a “sneak-peak” reception on the expo floor. Go to <http://nebiomassheat.com/> for more information.

#### **EVT Deep Energy Retrofit Program - Due May 1**

Efficiency Vermont facilitates an annual competitive process to support deep energy retrofit projects. Using real-time measurement to evaluate each participant's progress, EVT looks at each facility as a whole, measuring all energy usage across fuel types. Selected recipients are paired with a dedicated energy consultant and receive financial assistance of up to \$125,000 per building. For more details, [download the program FAQ](#) or [download the application](#).

#### **BCSWA Composter Sales - For delivery May 7**

The Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance will be selling backyard composters and kitchen compost containers again this spring. We will be taking orders soon, and composters will be distributed on Saturday May 7<sup>th</sup>. We also will hold composting workshops that day. If you are interested, visit the Alliance website at [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org) for more information.



**Vermont Community Development Association's Spring Conference - May 10**

*Blazing a Trail: The Economic Impact & Future of Vermont's Trails & Recreation Paths*

Many Vermont communities are actively exploring the ways in which trail systems and recreation paths can serve both a recreational and economic function. Join VCDa on May 10th in Burke to:

- ⇒ Discuss strategies to advance the recreational economy and how trails and recreation serve as economic drivers.
- ⇒ Explore the role that trails and recreation play in our rural working landscape as well as in our downtowns.
- ⇒ Learn about successes, opportunities, and challenges in developing new trail systems and integrating recreation and community development.
- ⇒ Hear what the future holds for larger regional trails systems and recreation paths in Vermont communities.

More information coming soon at: <http://www.vtcda.org/events.html>.

Contact Theresa Bachand at 802-229-9111 or [tbachand@vlct.org](mailto:tbachand@vlct.org).

**BCRC Annual Dinner Meeting - May 18 - Save the Date!**

Celebrate BCRC's 50th Anniversary at the Publyk House in Bennington, with local author Ellen Stimson as our guest speaker, a look at the seventeen towns and villages in our region, delicious food, a spectacular view, and great company! More information and invitations coming next month!

**BCSWA Spring Household Hazardous Waste Event - May 20**

The Town of Bennington will hold a household hazardous waste event on Saturday, May 20, from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM for residents of the 13 BCSWA towns at the Bennington Transfer Station, 904 Houghton Lane, Bennington. Small businesses registered as conditionally exempt generators may also bring materials, but must pay for the costs of disposal and must pre-register.

Contact Michael Batcher at [mbatcher@bcrcvt.org](mailto:mbatcher@bcrcvt.org) or (802) 442-0713 x 2 or visit [www.bcswavt.org](http://www.bcswavt.org) for more information.

