Bennington County Regional Commission

 **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**April 23, 2021**

**8:30 AM**

**BCRC Offices - 210 South Street, Bennington**

**and Via ZOOM**

Present: Dan Monks, Suzanne dePeyster, John LaVecchia, Dimitri Garder, James Salerno

Staff: Jim Sullivan, Bill Colvin

Minutes of February Meeting

Motion to approve the Minutes as presented by Monks. Second by LaVecchia. Passed unanimously.

Financial Report

Sullivan provided a brief overview of the FY 2021 Q3 Financial Report. It is the first one that BCRC’s new financial manager, Amanda Stevens, prepared and she and Sullivan worked together to review and revise the report, and to assess the status of each of BCRC’s many individual grant programs. A few important observations:

* We are ahead on income, partly due to some new revenue sources, but mostly due to aggressively spending down some of our grant programs, particularly TPI (Transportation) and RDC (BCIC/economic development) funds.
* Some of the new programs and/or agreements include the Everett/SVHC (SVC Campus) reuse study @ $36,000, the Energizer Reuse Study @ $20,000 (to BCRC, an additional $30,000 to a consultant), and a new Bennington Redevelopment Group (Putnam) agreement to cover some of our past work as well as upcoming work on Phase II (about $30,000). Some of these funds will be spent this year and some will carry over to FY 2022.
* Overall expenses are slightly less than budgeted, primarily due to reduced travel, meetings, and related costs avoided because of COVID restrictions. At the same time, we had some unbudgeted cost increases related to the office move and dealing with the transition in the financial position.
* Net income is very much in the black at the moment ($137,000+), but that number will come down considerably during Q4 as we won’t have program revenue to cover all of our staff costs in certain areas. However, we expect fairly strong revenues from the Everett and Energizer projects that have relatively short timeframes for completion. We anticipate finishing the fiscal year with a surplus close to our original projection.

Discussion re FY 2022 budget projections: Indications from the Legislature are that, while we won’t see any budget increases in our major state grant programs, we can expect some “one time” money, likely $75,000 (relatively unrestricted), $10,000+ to help municipalities administer their ARPA funds, and possibly some extra funds (either directly or through some of our small towns and villages) to support efforts to update/modernize local land use regulations. In addition, some state agencies may look to RPCs for assistance in certain areas (DPS in energy planning, for instance) and certain municipalities may look for some BCRC assistance in developing plans to make best use of their ARPA funds (and possibly federal infrastructure funds…), but it is too early to tell for sure. These funds, although of limited duration, may provide an opportunity to hire an additional staff person – discussed below in the context of Transition Planning.

May Meeting and Elections

The May meeting (via Zoom) will include a short business meeting covering the BCRC election and Bylaw amendment vote (concerning terms of office) and procedural matters that need to be attended to for the BCIC. Colvin and Sullivan also will provide a brief overview of the past year and a look ahead to some of the work we will be doing. Following that, featured presenters will be from the Regenerative Food Network, a diverse group of entrepreneurs seeking to create a vibrant regional food system in southern Vermont. As part of that presentation, our VISTA, Callie Fishburn, will review the food system asset map that she helped develop with CAPA.

The members of last year’s nominating committee (Charlie Rockwell, Nancy Faesy, Ed Shea) have agreed to serve again this year. Suzanne dePeyster stated that after 40+ years of service in a leadership position on the BCRC she will not be seeking re-election as an officer, so the Commission will need to elect a new Treasurer. It was suggested that Cinda Morse should be contacted as a likely (and qualified!) candidate. If she is willing and is elected, the Chair would need to appoint another member to the Executive Committee. Sullivan will help Janet Hurley coordinate the election process and facilitate communication with the nominating committee regarding commissioners who may be interested in serving.

Update on the American Rescue Plan (ARPA)

Municipal Funding and Eligible Expenditures: A spreadsheet showing the likely distribution of local ARPA funds was reviewed. Noted that “County” funds allocated to Vermont will be distributed to municipalities within each county proportionately based on population. The amount of money involved is considerable and can be spent between this summer and the end of 2024. Eligible activities range from replacement of lost revenue, to support for local businesses and organizations impacted by the pandemic, to investments in municipal infrastructure. More guidance will be forthcoming – certainly something to watch as potential community development benefits resulting from strategic investment of these funds can be significant for many communities. The committee discussed timing and content of messaging to towns and villages and the type of assistance that the BCRC may be able to provide.

State Budget and Administration/Legislative Priorities: Documents highlighting priorities, from the governor’s office and the legislature, for spending ARPA state funds were reviewed. Although relative amounts allocated by year differ, there will be money for economic recovery, broadband, water and sewer infrastructure, housing, and various “climate” initiatives. As noted, some initiatives may see some state agencies looking to RPC/RDCs for support.

Also potentially in the mix is the American Jobs Plan (President Biden’s infrastructure proposal) on the horizon which could result in even more money to broadband, transportation facilities, and water and sewer systems (and a few other things ranging from childcare and schools to workforce development). Will monitor and report at the next meeting.

Planning for Meetings in the Post-Covid Era

The committee discussed how and when to transition to in-person meetings in the post (or mostly post) Covid era. Interest in getting back to in-person executive committee and full commission meetings, although should utilize virtual meeting systems we’ve developed for some executive committee and committee meetings. Also discussed making use of the new – quite large (30+ capacity) – meeting room now have available next to our office.

Community and Economic Development Report

Colvin provided an update on the community and economic development front, including the high profile property reuse studies the BCRC is engaged in. He noted the value of combining our staff planning and economic development skills and experience. Synergies are continuing to grow as staff deploy their unique skills to various planning, transportation, community development projects. Sullivan expressed his appreciation to Colvin and to the BCIC board for their support and cooperation as the BCRC continues to transition into a true regional planning and development agency.

Progress Reporting – Jim Sullivan

Transition Planning: Focus on staffing where we may be able to hire an additional person using primarily one-time money, a move that would facilitate the transition next year as the new staff could remain with the BCRC after Sullivan retires. Budget impact would be minimal if reorganization also involves promotion of existing staff. Sullivan will report more details at the next meeting when he will have prepared a budget and work plan that reflects the new position – if that all comes to pass.

BCRC/BCIC: Although the core BCIC/RDC funds are burned through quite quickly, major losses or reallocation of funds between programs are minimized by virtue of new projects that are enabled by our RPC/RDC collaboration (Putnam, Energizer, Everett, CUD support, projects with the BDCC related to the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone), as well as through our relatively modest municipal appropriations. Sullivan noted that he attempts to avoid “silo-ing” of project funds into BCRC or BCIC buckets, instead considering the Commission budget as a whole.

Putnam Project: Colvin provided an update, with Phase I is moving along with occupancies and Phase II planning actively underway and, importantly, a draft agreement for funding to the BCRC for our work on the project.

Other Business and Adjourn: Everyone expressed their appreciation for all of dePeyster’s many and diverse contributions to the growth and success of the BCRC over the years. We will miss her (after the June executive committee meeting – her last one!).

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:44 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Sullivan

4-23-2021