

Bennington County Regional Commission

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Friday - December 23, 2022
8:30 AM
Meeting Conducted via ZOOM

Present: Dan Monks, Cinda Morse, Sheila Kearns, Dimitri Garder, Nick Zaiac, Janet Hurley, Bill Colvin, James Salerno (@ 8:45am)

A motion to approve the Minutes of the October 28, 2022 BCRC Executive Committee Meeting was made by Morse. Seconded by Zaiac. Five in favor; none opposed; one abstention (Kearns).

- Staffing Update

Janet Hurley began her tenure with BCRC as Assistant Director and Planning Program Manager on November 28, 2022. Janet has hit the ground running to take on several projects where Cat Bryars and Jim Sullivan left off. Janet also submitted an MPG application seeking ~\$25,000 for the Town of Manchester to develop a new town plan. Callie Fishburn and Jim Sullivan submitted MPG applications for Pownal, Woodford, and Bennington. Hurley has engaged most directly with the Arlington Planning Commission to move the Arlington Zoning Bylaw revision toward a conclusion.

Samantha Page will be joining the BCRC as a Regional Planner beginning part-time in mid-January and full-time in June. Samantha is finishing up her master's degree in Urban Planning at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Samantha has taken several advanced GIS courses and has strong interests in housing, transportation and community and economic development. She has prior experience in the region having worked at The Clark prior to graduate school.

Jonathan Cooper has been promoted to Community & Economic Development Program Manager effective January 1, 2023.

Colvin noted that additional hiring decisions would be made after the midyear budget review and meetings with all staff to understand current and coming workload expectations and demands. There was additional discussion regarding general staffing and Colvin's continuing role in Community & Economic Development.

- Mid-year Budget Preview

The Executive Committee will be asked to review and approve a full midyear budget adjustment at your February meeting which will allow time for Amanda to log and evaluate six months of fiscal year revenues and expenses through December 31, 2022. As of this writing, Amanda has closed out the months July-October 2022 (attached) and based upon four months of activity, a few items should be highlighted:

- Non-pass-through revenues and expenses generally hue close to projections.
- Pass through items related to the BGS grants (line 4107) and solid waste programming (lines 4125; 4104; 5301; 5301a) make up the bulk of the significant revenue and expense deviations.
- Items related to office expense and staffing are lower than projected as we have not yet started paying rent for the additional office space and staffing up has taken longer than projected and budget development

Morse requested that the midyear budget review include a current and projected staffing update and a look at the approved annual workplan with any significant changes highlighted.

- Executive Committee Vacancies

Kearns was welcomed and thanked for agreeing to join the BCRC Executive Committee as Secretary. She was elected by the Commissioners present at the November 17, 2022, meeting in Arlington.

One position on the Executive Committee remains open. Colvin suggested the current Executive Committee members spend some time deciding if they are willing to continue to serve and, if so, in what positions. At the April 2023 Executive Committee meeting we could make a final determination on a suggested slate of officers to be proposed to the full Commission at the BCRC Annual Meeting in May. This would reset the terms of the officers for three years commencing in May 2023. The Chair-appointed position could happen immediately following the election of the new Chair in May to sync up with the terms of the officers. We would also ask the BCRC Economic Development Committee (former BCIC) to appoint, or reappoint, its two EC members in May so all terms are aligned.

Morse and Garder discussed the advantages and disadvantages of all terms being aligned. Monks noted the bylaws require at the least the four officer positions terms are aligned as elections occur at a BCRC Annual Meeting. All agreed to think on this topic and revisit at the February and April Executive Committee meetings.

- Program Updates

Community and Economic Development

- Communications Union District: As noted at the last Executive Committee meeting, the Southern Vermont Communication Union District (CUD) was awarded its request for \$9.1MM in funding to support the build out of fiber to remote locations in the region through a partnership with Fidium

Fiber/Consolidated Communications in August. An agreement extending BCRC support services to the CUD through the end of 2022 was secured and we will be working on another one to provide administrative support in 2023. There was discussion of a possible expanded role in CUD administration by BCRC with strong support for this in particular by Kearns and Zaiac.

- Capitol for a Day/ARPA Funding Community Meeting: BCRC assisted the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and the Governor's office in arranging a meeting of all State agencies with ARPA and other sources of funding for municipal, organizational and business leaders in the region. The event, held at the Manchester Community Library on December 5th, drew about sixty community members who had the chance to hear about funding resources and ask questions about their existing or potential projects. Thanks to the BCRC staff who really helped get the work out to people and produced a strong turnout on very short notice around the Thanksgiving holiday.
- Putnam Phase 2: Planning for the next phase of the Putnam Block Redevelopment is picking up steam as M&S Development has completed an initial feasibility study and a draft investor pitch deck. Investors and other funding will be sought through the fall and winter with the goal of lining up all financing by summer 2023. BCRC continues to support the effort and has a new pre-development services agreement for FY23.
- Public Health Equity Projects: All three public health equity projects on which BCRC is working are hitting full stride. While we are on track to complete all the projects under the original timeline of May 31, 2023, no-cost extensions have been issued for each. The January BCRC Commission Meeting will be dedicated to learning more about all three public health equity projects.

On the VT PHI "backbone" project, eleven grant applications were received for \$150,000 in funding to support local public health equity projects. A review committee made up of community members awarded funding to five projects. Projects included a free pop-up medical clinic, the creation of an orchard and greenhouse at the middle school, development of a revolving fund for housing stipends for refugees, distribution of personal hygiene products to disadvantaged youth, and distribution of bikes and training classes for low- and moderate-income people. Those projects are now all underway.

For the VAPDA/Regional Planning Commission Health Equity Planning Project the Planning Toolkit has been completed in draft form and comments have been submitted to Lamoille County Planning Commission, which is coordinating the work on behalf of VAPDA. Deadline for completion of the toolkit is year end. is also gaining momentum. There is an implementation aspect of this grant, as well, which will support some BCRC

work at the Bike Hub and Bennington Community Market and work with unhoused youth in the community.

For the GBICS Homeless Health Equity project, partnering consulting firm Proscenium and BCRC completed the initial draft of the Unaccompanied Youth Assessment. The second part of this project entails working with a design professional to identify design, programming, and possible locations for a public sanitation/homeless services facility in the community.

Colvin noted that BCRC's work in public health equity will be the focus of the January 19, 2023 BCRC Commission Meeting.

- Dorset Housing Study: We have completed the data collection/summary task and are integrating that data into a readable and user-friendly report along with public-private partnerships and best practices research that is nearing completion. We expect to have a draft of the final report in mid-January. The study will examine creative public/private partnerships where municipalities have incentivized the development of housing in communities like Dorset.
- Armory Reuse Study: We have completed the revised site inventory and history phase of the project and have issued our survey for input from potential user groups. That phase will be completed by early January, and we expect the full reuse plan to be in final form by the end of March.
- Pownal Commercial Siting Criteria Study: A delayed round of municipal planning grant (MPG) funding is supporting this project in which BCRC will work with the Town of Pownal to develop siting criteria and identify potential sites for commercial and industrial uses in the community. We are reviewing source material and recent business development activities within Pownal – including the redevelopment of highly-visible assets within Pownal Center Village and along Route 7 – to refine our list of potential interviews beyond the Planning Commission and Select Board.
- Community Recovery & Revitalization Program (CRRP): CRRP grants are available to for-profit, nonprofit, and municipal applicants. The funding is intended for projects making capital improvements or capital expansions that spur economic recovery and revitalization in communities across the state. Eligible projects may include those that assist industries most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic such as arts and entertainment, hospitality, agriculture, and educational services. The funding is also available for capital expenditures that support childcare and affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households, and to establish or improve municipal water and wastewater systems to build housing or create jobs through business creation and expansion. Projects must show a COVID impact. In Bennington there are also two qualified census tracts (QCTs) that provide additional flexibility for applicants.

<https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/funding-incentives/community-recovery-and-revitalization-program>

- Southern Vermont Economic Development District Planning: Work on a submission to the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) to establish a formal Economic Development District across Southern Vermont (Bennington and Windham counties) is nearing completion. Legal work for the formation of the entity, which will help guide revisions to and implementation of the *Southern Vermont Economic Development Strategy* is complete. BCRC staff and those from our Windham County partners spent the fall months visiting municipalities seeking letters of support as well as soliciting letters from regional businesses, and institutions. BCRC is partnering with Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation and Windham Regional Commission on this effort.

Planning Programs

- Transportation: Several communities have recently expressed interest in our traffic/speed monitoring equipment and reports. We have deployed the unit along several local roadways where concerns have been expressed by local officials and residents. Some of the data may be used to pursue lowering of speed limits, some to support reclassification of roads, and in North Bennington, where we have conducted numerous counts, to provide the basis for a village center planning project that BCRC will complete using TPI funds. We are hoping that one of our new hires will be able to kick off a regional bike-ped planning study that is part of our TPI work program for the coming year (TPI “year” begins October 1 because of federal funding).
- Municipal Planning: Work is continuing on five municipal land use regulations, with four more to be completed during 2023, as part of the “bylaw modernization grant” program. BCRC assisted four communities with Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) applications:
 - Woodford – relatively simple town plan update, BCRC expected to do all of the work;
 - Bennington – phase one of a town plan update focusing on public outreach, development of themes, especially around DEI, with BCRC likely coordinating, possibly with a subconsultant;
 - Pownal – planning and conceptual design for a “town green” or park adjacent to the new town hall, with BCRC potentially coordinating the public outreach and report development.
 - Manchester - a new town plan focusing on updated demographic and housing data, public outreach, and an action-oriented structure. BCRC is optimally positioned to function as the planning consultant on the effort.

BCRC is assisting Sunderland in the development of an application for Village Center designation for the section of the community along Route 7A near the access road to Equinox Mountain.

- Energy: Big news on this front is that ACT 172, the municipal building energy efficiency program, has gotten the official go-ahead to be implemented as planned. Once the Department of Buildings and General Services sorts out what it is going to look like, RPCs will receive up to \$2.5 million over the next two (three?) years to assist with implementation. We had budgeted to begin this work in FY 23 but have been on hold waiting for various issues to be resolved at the state level. Our lead staff on the project has been able to work instead on two public health initiatives for the first half of the FY, but, fortunately, will be able to begin charging time to Act 172 in the second half of the FY. We also are working with a UVM intern to gather information from towns and villages that we hope will expedite access to grant funds. The BCRC has been coordinating work statewide, with the Public Service Department, on updates to energy data, electricity generation modeling, and local and regional energy plan guidelines.
- Environmental: BCRC submitted an application for the EPA for a \$500,000 Brownfields assessment grant. If funded this award would be good for a period of three years. We have completely exhausted our previous (2017 – extended twice due to Covid) \$300,000 EPA assessment grant, as well as \$99,000 in additional State of Vermont assessment money made available last year. Priority projects listed in the grant included All Service Citgo, Bradford Mill and Lauzon Machine in Bennington and Sweeney Saw Mill and 301 Depot Street in Manchester. Grant award announcements are expected in last Spring 2023. We are also continuing to assist towns and villages with municipal roadway general permit requirements and other stormwater management and flood resiliency projects.

Other Business

Colvin expressed his appreciation and gratitude for the support of the Executive Committee throughout the transition and his enthusiasm for his integration into the Director's role. Kearns was again thanked by all for her willingness to serve on the Executive Committee.

There being no other business everyone exchanged holiday wishes and the meeting was adjourned at 9:50am.

Respectfully submitted,
Bill Colvin
Director