



Bennington County Regional Commission

# *News and Notes*

## *January 2024*

### **January BCRC Meeting - Community Development in Bennington & Shaftsbury**

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**Thursday, January 18th at 5:30 PM**

**Cole Hall  
61 Buck Hill Road  
Shaftsbury, VT**

*A light meal will be provided.*

After the business portion of the meeting, Martha Cornwell of the Shaftsbury Select Board and Shaftsbury Economic Development Committee will give an update on the committee's activities. The Economic Development Committee is tasked with promoting economic revitalization in the Town of Shaftsbury. Past efforts have included securing Village Center Designations for South Shaftsbury and Shaftsbury Center. The Economic Development Committee also [hosted a ribbon-cutting](#) of the recently purchased land for a new Town Green in November.

After the Shaftsbury presentation, Zak Hale, CEO of Hale Resources, will give an update on the activities of the Bennington Housing Committee, including the Benn High project.



Town Green ribbon-cutting.  
Photo from the Bennington  
Banner.

## Three Bennington County Municipalities Receive State Planning Grants

On December 19, 2023, the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development announced Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) and Bylaw Modernization Grant (BMG) program recipients for fiscal year 2024. In the Bennington region, the towns of Bennington and Shaftsbury received municipal planning grants and the Village of Manchester received a bylaw modernization grant.

Bennington's \$31,000 grant will fund Phase 2 of work on a new town plan. The fiscal-year 2023 MPG-funded Phase 1 public outreach work with a DEI focus is underway. Informed by this Phase1 outreach, the new grant will fund the drafting of the town plan and a public rollout of the draft. Based on public feedback a final plan will be presented to the selectboard for adoption by January 22, 2026, when the current town plan expires.

The \$12,000 Shaftsbury grant will allow the town to hire a consultant to devise an economic development strategy and implementation plan for the town with particular focus on South Shaftsbury Village. This work will be informed by redevelopment plans underway for historic Cole Hall, which serves as the town offices in South Shaftsbury.

The Village of Manchester received a \$15,000 bylaw modernization grant to continue work on bylaws revisions begun under a fiscal year 2022 consortium grant involving nine municipalities in the Bennington region. The new grant will allow Manchester Village to take a deeper dive into its land use and development regulations to remove further barriers to housing development and to draw what are now four separate regulatory instruments into one streamlined ordinance.

## BCRC Hosts New “Brown Bag” Series for Local Officials

On November 14, 2023, the BCRC sponsored the first brown bag meeting of local officials from throughout the Bennington region at the Bennington Community Market to discuss land use planning and regulation issues. Discussion by the 14 attendees was provocative and useful for the various municipalities represented (Bennington, Old Bennington, North Bennington, Stamford, Arlington, Manchester Village, Manchester, and Glastenbury). Our wide-ranging discussion revealed different communities facing similar questions and challenges and various approaches to addressing them that were best suited to individual communities. Check out BCRC's new [Land USE FAQs page!](#)



Engage with your peers from around the Bennington region at our next brown bag. Bring your questions and ideas and your hot drink and breakfast.

The first brown bag discussion at the Bennington Community Market was well-attended.

WHAT: BCRC Quarterly Brown Bag  
WHEN: Tuesday, January 16, 2024, 9:00 AM  
WHERE: Martha Canfield Library meeting room  
528 East Arlington Road

## MERP Assessments Begin in Bennington County

[The Municipal Energy Resilience Program](#) (MERP) is a state program managed by the Department of Buildings and General Services, that provides funding and technical assistance to municipalities to improve energy efficiency in municipal buildings. MERP includes three components:

- Community Capacity Mini-Grants of up to \$4,000 to do public education and outreach about energy resilience and/or hire a consultant. [Still accepting applications!](#)
- Free energy assessments for municipal buildings.
- Implementation grants of up to \$500,000 for municipalities to make energy efficiency upgrades to municipal buildings. Coming soon!

Thirteen municipalities in Bennington County have applied for assessments for a total of 28 municipal buildings. The first assessments in Bennington County took place the week of



Checking the HVAC system on the roof of the Bennington Firehouse.



Setting up the blower door test at the Woodford Town Office.

November 14<sup>th</sup> in Arlington, Bennington, and North Bennington. On November 28<sup>th</sup>, the

Woodford Town Office had the first Level 2 Energy Assessment in the County, which is a more detailed assessment that includes thermal imaging and a blower door test to measure air leakage in a building.

Energy assessments will continue through the spring of 2024. Municipalities that receive an assessment are eligible to apply for an implementation grant of up to \$500,000.

## Sunderland Becomes Green Procurement Town

Sunderland has become one of the first municipalities in Southern Vermont to adopt a green procurement policy. The Sunderland Energy Committee developed a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was presented to the select board and formally adopted late last year. The energy committee will now work with municipal officials and staff to develop an administrative process. The MOU states that the “Town of Sunderland will prioritize improvements, systems, vehicles and equipment, and other energy-related products that are energy-efficient and powered by, or are capable of being powered by, renewable energy sources, and will attempt to eliminate, wherever feasible, the use of fossil fuel.”

## 2023 CEDS Vital Projects Announced

Every year, BCRC and Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) issue a call for local organizations and community leaders to let us know what projects they are working on – and to highlight how those projects align with our region’s development goals.

These development goals are outlined in the Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a federally approved five-year action plan for growing our regional economy. Our current CEDS was developed in 2019 with a wide range of community input, and prioritizes actions that result in a community that is welcoming, forward-thinking, and healthy. (Read more about the CEDS and the specific objectives at [sovermontzone.com/ceds](https://sovermontzone.com/ceds).)



The Benn High redevelopment was selected as a vital project.

Each year, a community review committee reads all project submissions and selects ten to be named our region’s “Vital Projects”; whether selected as a vital project or not, all submitted projects become an official part of our CEDS, which can then boost their visibility and eligibility for funding.

The committee reviewed a record-breaking 97 projects from municipalities, businesses, and non-profit organizations across the two-county region, meeting in Wilmington to complete a final project review and select ten vital projects.

The selected Vital Projects include large workforce programs and infrastructure improvements to those with a more targeted impact on a single community, such as the redevelopment of the old Bennington High School building and a playground for a low-income housing community. [Read more of the press release from BDCC here.](#)

## Downtown Transportation Grants Open with Expanded Eligibility

The Department of Housing and Community Development is pleased to announce the availability of the [Downtown Transportation Fund](#) (DTF) to support revitalization efforts in Designated Downtowns and eligible Designated Village Centers. Since 1999, the DTF program has invested over \$14 million in public infrastructure and helped municipalities update streetscaping, parking, rail, and bus facilities, bicycle and pedestrian safety, utilities, street lighting, and wayfinding signage. These vital infrastructural improvements to civic centers directly contribute to healthier and happier communities.

The Downtown Transportation Fund has expanded eligibility to Designated Village Centers that have participated in the [Better Connections Program](#) and Designated Village Centers within Chittenden County that have completed a comprehensive downtown/village center/community area planning process with public input, comparable to the Better Connections Program. See the program application for a full list of eligible municipalities. Applications are due February, 19, 2024.



## Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Clean Water Projects Database Recently Updated

The BCRC just completed a grant funded through Section 604b of The Federal Clean Water Act. The intent of this grant, which was awarded through the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, was to review, update and add new projects into the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Clean Water Projects Database.

A review of five municipal Storm Water Master Plans and subsequent meetings with road foremen and select boards identified 14 projects which have been completed. These projects have been updated to reflect a change from "proposed" to "completed". While some of these stormwater projects were completed due to recent severe weather events, the majority were funded through The VTRANS **Grants In Aid Program** or **Better Roads Grant Program**. There has certainly been a recognition amongst our municipalities that projects identified in Stormwater Master Plans have a high rate of success on various grant applications. There were numerous stormwater projects identified which had not been entered into the Clean Water Projects Database. These projects were added into the database as being "proposed".

Twenty-Five riparian buffer and floodplain restoration projects either proposed or completed by the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, The Bennington County Conservation District and Trout Unlimited have been added to the Clean Water Projects Database. Many of these projects were funded through a cost share agreement with the Green Mountain National Forest and occurred along the Batten Kill and The Green River.

## BCRC Works with Bennington on Town Plan Update

The BCRC has been engaged by the Town of Bennington to help update and redesign the town plan based on community values of equity and inclusion. The project is split into two phases: phase 1 involves extensive community engagement to understand Bennington's challenges and identify a community vision of what Bennington could be. In phase 2, the results of the engagement will inform the updated town plan to make it more reflective of everyone in Bennington's community.

Phase 1 is officially underway: BCRC has begun conducting small discussion groups in partnership with local organizations, and a survey is open to the public and accessible online and as hard copies at the Town Office and BCRC office (<https://forms.office.com/r/Sc6w3KPkdA>). And five community roundtable meetings about key topics in the town plan—including transportation, land use, housing, and climate and energy—are scheduled for January through early March. For more information about the project and to see a schedule of events, visit the town's website: [tinyurl.com/bton2050](https://benningtonvt.org/services/planning_permitting/planning_commission/) or [https://benningtonvt.org/services/planning\\_permitting/planning\\_commission/](https://benningtonvt.org/services/planning_permitting/planning_commission/)

### What should Bennington be like in the future?

Come share your ideas on the challenges and opportunities of living, working, and learning in Bennington. We invite all community members: residents, workers, business owners, and visitors. Your input will guide town policy into the future!



**Saturday, January 20**  
10:30 AM-12:00 PM  
Bennington Recreation Center

**Wednesday, January 24**  
5:00-6:30 PM  
Zoom (online meeting)

**Thursday, February 15**  
5:30-7:00 PM  
Mt. Anthony Union Middle School

**Wednesday, February 21**  
12:00-1:30 PM  
Bennington Firehouse

**Saturday, March 2**  
2:00-3:30 PM  
Bennington Free Library

To register:  
[tinyurl.com/bton2050](https://tinyurl.com/bton2050)



## Trolley Line Path Advisory Committee Conducts Site Visit

Members from BCRC's Trolley Line Path Advisory Committee met to walk potential sections of the proposed shared-use path. The group walked parts of the Greenberg Headwaters Park in Bennington, and visited the site of the formerly proposed southern leg of the Bennington Bypass. The advisory group plans to meet on a monthly basis starting in the new year—reach out to Samantha Page at [spage@bcrct.org](mailto:spage@bcrct.org) if you are interested in joining!



## What BCRC Staff are Reading/Listening To

Bill is reading "[America's Best Example of Turning Around a Dying Downtown](#)" from the Washington Post and [Fragile Neighborhoods: Repairing American Society One Zip Code at a Time](#) by Seth D. Kaplan.

Dara is reading [The Octopus in the Parking Garage: A Call for Climate Resilience](#) by Rob Verchick.

Jonathan is reading "[A 30-Year Trap: The Problem with America's Weird Mortgages](#)" from the New York Times.

Callie is reading [Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet](#) by Ben Goldfarb and "[What Will Make Home Buyers Consider Climate Risk? What Happens Once They Do?](#)" from the Lincoln Institute.

Scott is listening to the [Big Dig podcast series](#) from GBH News.

BCRC in the news: [Making it on Main Street Bennington takes optimism and a village | Vermont Business Magazine \(vermontbiz.com\)](#)

## Events and Opportunities....

### Climate Economy Resilient Communities Program

VCRD's Resilient Communities Program supports three to five communities each year working on local climate action solutions that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lower energy use, increase climate resilience, and/or strengthen the local climate economy. Services are adaptable based on the community's needs and can include support with community engagement processes, strategic planning, technical assistance, and/or project implementation. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until January 16, 2024. [Learn more and apply.](#)

**Knowledge Bites: Working with a Project Manager | January 18th at 12 PM**

What does a project manager do? Why and when would you hire one for your community project? And how would you pay for it? Real-world stories from a PM and a community leader. Hear from Anthony Girard ([GPI Construction](#)) about the basics and the process — PM vs CM vs OPM! — and from Charlie Hunter about how the Miss Bellows Falls diner project committee knew they needed a project manager and what it's been like so far. [Register here.](#)

**Regional Emergency Management Committee Meeting | February 13th at 6 PM**

Location TBD. Contact [dzink@bcrcvt.org](mailto:dzink@bcrcvt.org) for more information.

**Complete Streets Winter Webinar Series**

Local Motion is hosting a [series of webinars](#) to help communities improve walking and biking infrastructure. Upcoming webinars:

January 11th: What's a Walk/Bike/Roll Master Plan and Why Your Town Needs One

February 29th: Funding Walk/Bike Infrastructure in Vermont

March 21st: How (and Why) to Build Great Bike Parking

April 18th: Low-Cost Traffic Calming Techniques and Walk/Bike Solutions for Rural Vermont

**Trade Show Assistance Grants**

Is your Vermont agriculture or forestry businesses looking to expand into new markets? Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets' Trade Show Assistance Grants might be able to help! These matching grants provide businesses with funds to exhibit and sell their Vermont products at trade shows targeting out-of-state buyers. Funding can partially offset the expenses associated with exhibiting at trade shows, which provide excellent opportunities to network with wholesale buyers and expand into new domestic and international markets. Applicants may include up to five trade shows in their yearly marketing plan, requesting a total of between \$2,000 and \$5,000 in eligible reimbursements for shows that take place between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025.

The application period will close on January 15, 2024 at 11:59 PM. Please email Kristen Brassard at [Kristen.Brassard@vermont.gov](mailto:Kristen.Brassard@vermont.gov) with any questions.

<http://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/tradeshow>

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