



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

January 2023

January BCRC Meeting - Health Equity Programs

Thursday, January 19 at 5:30 PM

**The Barn
1 Monument Circle
Bennington, VT**

A light meal will be provided. No remote meeting option is available.

After the meal, join us for presentations from staff at the Bennington Office of Local Health, the Bike Hub, Greater Bennington Community Services, and BCRC about local health equity projects. Staff from the Bennington Office of Local Health will give an overview of their services and the Vermont Community Health Equity Partnership (VTCHEP). Then board members from the Bennington Bike Hub will present about their bike access program funded through a subgrant from VTCHEP. After the VTCHEP presentation, Callie Fishburn from BCRC will preview the new Municipal Health Equity Planning Toolkit that was co-developed by the state's eleven regional planning commissions to help municipalities integrate health equity into planning initiatives. Finally, the director of Greater Bennington Community Services (GBCS) will discuss the homeless health equity capacity building grant they received to develop an unaccompanied youth needs assessment and a feasibility study for a wellness hub in downtown Bennington.



No RSVP necessary

A Message from the Director

The New Year brings thoughts of renewal, reflection, optimism for what is to come and perhaps a sense of longing as to what has now passed. The Bennington County Regional Commission begins 2023 with many of these thoughts in mind. As the BCRC transitions to its first year in more than thirty without Jim Sullivan on staff, we look back with gratitude for all Jim brought to the organization, the region and the state of Vermont.



In the past several weeks, I have heard Jim described frequently as “a planner’s planner”. His technical writing skills, knowledge of all things land use planning, energy and transportation-related were superlative. Jim was hard-working and disciplined but brought warmth, collegiality and support for the staff he oversaw so capably for more than twelve years as Director.

We were fortunate to be able to honor Jim’s time at the BCRC on two occasions, the first at his final BCRC Annual Meeting in May and again at his retirement party in December. The number of people that turned out for both, from near and far, is perhaps the best indicator of the impact Jim has had on the people and places he has helped the past three decades. Thank you, Jim! You will be missed tremendously.

I am grateful and humbled for the opportunity to move into the Director role at the BCRC. There are very big shoes to fill with Jim’s departure, but we have a dedicated staff of talented professionals ready to continue their great work on behalf of our seventeen member municipalities. I look forward to the time ahead working with the wonderful BCRC staff and with all our partner organizations, boards, community volunteers and businesses endeavoring to improve the lives of those living in Southwestern Vermont.

BCRC Helps Organize Capitol for a Day/ARPA Funding Community Meeting in Manchester

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 word out to people and produced a strong turnout on very short notice around the Thanksgiving holiday. More information about ARPA funding, including handouts that were distributed at the event, are available on BCRC’s [ARPA Resources page](#).



BCRC Welcomes New Assistant Director & Planning Program Manager

Janet Hurley started as BCRC's new Assistant Director/Planning Program Manager on November 28th. She previously worked as the Planning & Zoning Director for the Town of Manchester where she helped overhaul Manchester's zoning ordinance. At BCRC, she will put her experience to use, helping several towns in Bennington County update their zoning regulations, town plans, and overseeing other municipal planning projects. Janet lives with her family in Winhall. She can be reached at jhurley@bcrcvt.org or by phone at 802-442-0713 x310. Welcome Janet!



Community Recovery & Revitalization Program Now Open (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 Vital Projects Announced

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) are pleased to announce that ten projects submitted as part of the Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) have received Vital Project designation. The Southern Vermont CEDS is a federally-approved action plan for growing the regional economy. Each year, the CEDS includes new and updated project submissions from businesses and organizations that highlight activities strengthening the region.

Projects were selected by a CEDS Project Review Committee composed of members of the public and business community. The committee reviewed 78 projects from municipalities, businesses, and non-profit organizations across the two-county region. They met in Dover in early November to complete a final project review and select 10 vital projects. The committee offers its thanks and appreciation to all the organizations that submitted projects, and its congratulations to those receiving Vital Project designation. [Read more about the vital projects.](#)



New Weatherization Financing Program Available for Vermonters

Drafty, inefficient homes in need of weatherization will soon have a new affordable program available to them with the launch of the Weatherization Repayment Assistance Program (WRAP). The program, funded by \$9 million from the state and overseen by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA), will use an innovative on-bill payment model to help moderate-income Vermonters participate in comprehensive home energy projects.

WRAP will allow Vermont households to pay for qualifying weatherization projects like insulation and air sealing as well as heat pumps and advanced wood heating systems through a monthly charge on their utility bill that can be paid back over time. Both homeowners and renters can participate in the program.

Although the program is open to Vermonters of all incomes, the majority of program funding will be targeted to households earning between 80 to 120% of the area median income. Households earning 80% AMI or less are eligible for free services through the state's existing Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).

WRAP's on-bill payment mechanism intends to address challenges commonly encountered in weatherization, including high upfront costs and limited access to credit. WRAP will not run credit checks on customers, instead verifying a clean utility bill payment history. If a customer moves, the next occupant of the property will pay the surcharge for the time they occupy the property and experience the benefits of the measures.

VHFA anticipates that WRAP will begin funding projects early next year. Customers interested in learning more can contact Vermont Gas Systems at <https://vgsvt.com/weatherization-repayment-assistance-program/> (for all VGS customers), Burlington Electric Department at burlingtonelectric.com/contact or (802) 865-7300 (for all BED customers), or Efficiency Vermont at 1-888-921-5990 (for all others).

VLCT Announces New Federal Funding Assistance Program

In response to member requests, VLCT has created the Federal Funding Assistance Program (FFA). Modeled after the successful [ARPA Assistance and Coordination Program](#), FFA expands VLCT's work with ARPA to include the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL, aka Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, IIJA), the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and other new and existing state and federal grant programs. They will do the work of sifting through the tsunami of information, and work with their broad network of state, federal, statewide, and national partners to **curate only programs and resources for which municipalities are eligible and that are relevant to our Vermont scale**. As the program launches, VLCT has developed the following resources:

- New [Federal Funding Assistance Program webpage](#)
- VLCT's [Vermont Federal Funding Guidebook](#)
- "Consults On Call" – Book a 15-minute meeting with the FFA team during weekly office hours. Evening hours are available. Book your appointment [HERE](#). Need more than 15 minutes? Email ffa@vlct.org to schedule a longer consultation.



BCRC Applies for \$500,000 Brownfields Grant

The Bennington County Regional Commission has recently applied for a \$500,000 EPA brownfields community wide assessment grant to address brownfields sites in Bennington County. Bennington County was at the center of the industrial revolution and signs of that time are evident. Textile manufacturers, tanneries, electronic component manufacturers, petroleum storage, processing, and distribution establishments as well as the businesses that supported them have operated in our communities. Land uses on any given property shifted from one purpose to another several times over. Contamination at our brownfields sites include heavy metals, PCBs, volatile organic compounds, lead, petroleum, asbestos, solvents, and other potentially hazardous materials. There is a critical housing shortage in Bennington County and brownfields sites are affecting our ability to use infill properties and infrastructure to meet this need. Our target areas for this grant are Bennington and Manchester. These areas were chosen because our top five priority sites are located there and



Bradford Commons at 748 Main Street in Bennington is one of the sites included in the grant.



Sweeney Sawmill at 250 Town Shed Road in Manchester.

at least two of the five are slated for housing redevelopment. Our five priority sites were selected because they are already in the assessment pipeline with a Phase I environmental site assessment (ESA) completed and needing a Phase II ESA, or EPA already deemed the sites eligible. Each of these sites also has a redevelopment plan and someone interested in the property. Contact Jim Henderson at jhendeson@brcvt.org for more information.

What BCRC Staff are Reading/Listening To

Bill is reading ["City Planning for Tomorrow's Workforce: The Small-Town Advantage."](#)

Scott is listening to ["Reimagine Rural,"](#) a podcast by the Brookings Institute that features rural towns experiencing positive change. He is also reading [Shay's Settlement in Vermont: A Story of Revolt and Archaeology](#) by Stephen D. Butz.

Mark is reading ["The Climate Impact of Your Neighborhood,"](#) from the New York Times, and listening to the podcast, ["Not Just Bikes"](#).

Callie is listening to Burlington Electric Department's new [Net Zero Energy Podcast.](#)

Events and Opportunities....

Inflation Reduction Act Workshop: January 11th

Bill Laberge, owner of Grassroots Solar, will walk you through the various incentives that will be available in 2023. From electric vehicles to solar, heat pumps, weatherization, and electric service panel upgrades, there are opportunities to save money for your home, business, municipality or non-profit. Wednesday, January 11th at 4:30PM at the Manchester Community Library. Presented by the Dorset Energy Committee.

Annual Spring Flooding Seminar: January 25th

The annual Spring Flooding Seminar will be held virtually on January 25th, from 12:30 to 4:00 PM. Information will be focused on the upcoming flood season and how to prepare for, respond to, and recover from seasonal flooding. Several state agencies will give presentations to provide the audience with the best information for the season, including what to expect if there is any flooding. Following the main seminar, there will be three virtual question and answer sessions held on other days. The session for the Bennington County region will be held on February 8th, from 12:00 to 1:00PM. Registration is not required for these events, but you will need the links to the Teams Meetings. If you would like to virtually attend and request the link, or would like more information, please reach out to Allison Strohl at astrohl@bcrcvt.org.

Scholarships Available for Better Buildings by Design Conference

Efficiency VT has scholarships available for students and community partners to attend the 2023 Better Buildings by Design Conference. This year's theme will be *Mission to No Emissions: Connect, Create, Innovate*. The conference will take place on April 5th & 6th at the DoubleTree Hilton Burlington Hotel in South Burlington. You can find the details about the scholarship opportunities below:

- Student: <https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/trade-partners/bbd/student-scholarships>
- Community partner: <https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/trade-partners/bbd/community-partner-scholarship>.

Applications are due March 1, 2023.

Special Funding Round for Downtown and Village Center Tax Credits

In January 2023, during this special round of funding, \$800,000 in state income tax credits will be competitively available to projects that enhance the historic character and improve building safety of older and historic commercial and community buildings in these designated communities. The credits support general rehabilitation work, code compliance work, façade improvements, and flood mitigation projects, and may be combined with the federal program.

Applications for the next round of tax credits are due Monday, January 16, 2023, and the Vermont Downtown Board will make allocation decisions at their regularly scheduled board meeting in February 2023. Click [here](#) for more information.

Health Equity and Community Design TA Pilot Program

From safer, walkable, universally accessible streets to more green spaces, the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) in partnership with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is excited to announce the launch of a technical assistance pilot to support community-led design, placemaking, and healthy equity projects across Vermont. Approximately 20 to 35 communities will be accepted for in-person and virtual engagement sessions between December 2022 and October 2023. Visit the Healthy Communities Vermont website to [learn more](#).

Funding Available through the Better Places Program

Better Places is a non-competitive, community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public places serving Vermont's designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. The program provides one-on-one project coaching, local fundraising support, and two to one (2:1) matching grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$40,000 to make your community-led placemaking ideas happen. The program accepts applications on a rolling basis. Visit the [website](#) for more information.

Better Connections Program

The Better Connections Program (BC) is a partnership between the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and the Department of Public Health (VDH).

The BC program provides technical assistance and funds to local communities to help them achieve their goals and plan for growth. The program funds planning efforts to increase multi-modal transportation options and to improve land use, water quality, public health, and economic vitality in Vermont communities. The pre-application form is due January 31, 2023 and the full application is due February 17, 2023. [Click here for more information.](#)

Downtown Transportation Fund

The Department of Housing and Community Development is pleased to announce the availability of approximately \$3,600,000 in [Downtown Transportation Fund Grants](#) (DTF) to support revitalization efforts in Designated Downtowns and eligible Designated Village Centers. The maximum grant amount is \$200,000 with a 20% match requirement. Applications are due January 31, 2023 at 5PM.

Trade Show Assistance Grants

These grants provide financial support to help businesses exhibit and sell their Vermont products at out-of-state and international trade shows or virtual trade shows that target out-of-state buyers. These matching funds can mitigate the financial risks associated with exhibiting at trade shows, which provide excellent opportunities to network with wholesale buyers. 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, 2023 and March 31, 2024. Applications are due January 31, 2023. [Click here for more information.](#)

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