



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

March 2022



March 17 - BCRC Meeting:



Lets Grow Kids Child Care Campaign and Bennington County Open Arms Refugee Resettlement Support

This month's meeting of the BCRC will take place at 5:30 PM on Thursday, March 17 via ZOOM (login info below; if you would like to attend in-person we will have someone at the BCRC office conference room).

Child care is essential to Vermont's children, families, and economy, but even before the pandemic, 3 out of 5 of Vermont's youngest children did not have access to the care they needed. COVID has pushed child care programs to their breaking point; many have been forced to close classrooms, cut hours, and shut their doors permanently due to staffing shortages. Parents are struggling to get to their jobs and businesses are struggling to hire and retain employees. While the child care crisis in Vermont has never been more dire, we've also never been closer to a solution. [Let's Grow Kids](#) will join us to talk more about the Child Care Campaign, including:

- ◇ How our child care crisis is impacting Vermonters and businesses
- ◇ Our vision for achieving a transformed child care system that meets the needs of families, early childhood educators, and Vermont communities by 2025
- ◇ Updates on current legislative initiatives to achieve this vision
- ◇ How you can get involved and support the Child Care Campaign

Bennington County Open Arms (BCOA) is a group of some fifty volunteers, helping families who fled their homes in Afghanistan when their government fell last summer resettle in Bennington County. So far, four families have made Bennington their new home, with BCOA help and support from many generous individuals, churches, foundations and organizations. BCOA works with the Ethiopian Community Development Council's Multicultural Center in Brattleboro (<https://www.ecdcus.org/mccvt/>), helping the new arrivals with housing, education, health, cultural orientation, transportation, and legal paperwork. BCOA is a non-profit under the fiscal sponsorship of the United Church of Dorset and East Rupert. Here is a recent media report on BCOA's resettlement effort: [Banner Article](#) .

At the meeting, we'll also get an update on guidance for use of municipal ARPA funds!

Contact Jim Sullivan at the BCRC (jsullivan@bcrcvt.org) for more information.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81122021355>

Call-in: 1 929 205 6099

Meeting ID: Meeting ID: 811 2202 1355

American Rescue Plan Guidance for Local Funds

The US Treasury issued the [Final Rule for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#), along with an accessible and helpful [overview document](#). The finalized regulations give municipalities much more spending flexibility under the “Lost Revenue” category. All recipients in our region can now classify any portion or the entirety of their awards as Lost Revenue, without having to do any of the calculations formerly required under the interim draft rule. Funds that are categorized as “lost revenue” can be spent on “government services,” which includes any service traditionally provided by a government. There are still a number of restrictions and accounting implications to consider, and VLCT is encouraging all recipients to hold off on ARPA spending until further guidance has been developed. Waiting until after April 30th to begin spending will also make your town’s first progress report much easier to manage.

- While we wait for more guidance, this is a good time to be doing outreach in your community to gather input on project ideas and spending priorities. The BCRC is happy to assist with facilitating community dialogues.

Towns and villages that received local ARPA allocations are required to submit their first project and expenditure reports by April 30, 2022. US Treasury recently issued [a user guide for how to navigate the reporting portal](#).

Click below for a concise summary of the Final Rule developed by VLCT:



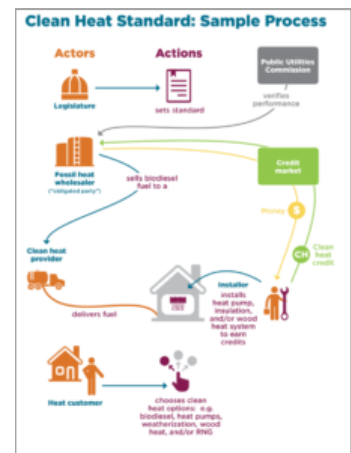
Clean Heat Standard Being Considered

The **Clean Heat Standard** was part of the Vermont [Climate Action Plan](#) aimed at mitigating the **startling 34% of Vermont's emissions coming from our buildings**. The Clean Heat Standard is a performance-based concept where both suppliers and users can choose how to transition to less carbon-intensive heating methods. The idea is to create certainty, stability, and predictability.

A proposal to implement such a program currently is being considered by the Vermont Legislature. To help understand this innovative proposal, Sen. Chris Pearson and Rep. Sarah Copeland-Hanzas sat down with Neale Lunderville, CEO of Vermont Gas Systems (VGS), to speak about this work.

You can view the interview here:

[Neale Lunderville—Clean Heat Standard](#)



Growing the Weatherization Workforce to Help Vermont Meet Climate Goals

*An Efficiency Vermont report on workforce needs in this critical sector;
a significant and longstanding issue in our region, in particular.*

Have you struggled to find a weatherization contractor recently? You might not be alone. Efficiency Vermont's hardworking [network of professional contractors](#) wants to help. But there aren't enough trained workers to serve the volume of [Vermonters who want to weatherize](#).

That problem isn't going away. Vermonters want to weatherize. It can save money and improve a home's comfort. Weatherization is also an important part of Vermont's climate goals. The [Energy Action Network \(EAN\) estimated](#) that Vermont needs to weatherize 13,400 homes each year by 2030 to meet its climate goals. Today, about 2,000 homes each year are weatherized. That is a big gap. To meet those ambitious goals, EAN estimates the [workforce needs to grow five-fold in the next five years](#).

In 2021, the Vermont Legislature created a working group to look into how to grow that workforce. Legislators selected Efficiency Vermont to lead the working group. In October, the working group [submitted its final report](#) back to the Legislature. The report included an overview of barriers to growing the weatherization workforce. The working group also recommended actions for the legislature to consider. Barriers to workforce development include: an unclear path for students interested in entering Vermont's construction trades; difficulties in hiring for jobs with sometimes challenging working conditions; wage competition; uncertainty around funding for future weatherization initiatives; shortage of affordable housing for workers.

The report included six recommendations to help grow the workforce. Some of these recommendations would also support broader economic vitality across sectors.

- **Weatherization workforce training & certification.** The working group designed a worker training and certification program to provide a clear career path for weatherization workers.
- **Marketing the trades as a future.** Young people are rarely encouraged to join the trades as a viable career opportunity. Marketing should include demonstrating field experiences and career growth potential.
- **Reaching out to New Americans.** New Americans are a growing part of our population. They are often looking for jobs when they move to Vermont. Some options to help open the door for employing New Americans include: offering construction-oriented English as a second language, expanded soft-skills training, and working with employers to support cultural awareness and improve communication.
- **Transparency around wages and job rates.** Vermont should track and report wages by position to spotlight wage disparities and prove long-term career opportunities.
- **Creating workforce housing.** Vermont should build new affordable housing for weatherization workers. Public-private partnerships could support this development.
- **Sustaining demand for weatherization.** Predictable, long-lasting incentives are critical to maintain and grow the weatherization workforce.

The working group proposed a career path for weatherization workers. For each step of the path, they identified the skills needed. After getting training, the state would certify the worker at that level. They would then be eligible for higher pay and better jobs. This path builds on established career levels used in construction. It also includes a certification for Residential HVAC Contractor. These are specialists in heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) in cold climates. HVAC and weatherization go hand-in-hand. Today, many employers already hire staff with expertise in both areas. As they progress, this may be a natural career opportunity for interested workers.

Cannabis Control Board Releases Guidance for Municipalities

The Legislature tasked the Cannabis Control Board with "safely, equitably, and effectively implementing and administering the laws enabling adult use and medical use cannabis in Vermont" The role of the Board includes implementing the laws governing the adult-use cannabis program, crafting all rules pertaining to the licensing and oversight of cannabis businesses, and overseeing compliance and enforcement of the program. The proposed CCB rules are in the process of becoming final rules with legal force and effect. These rules can be found on the CCB website: <https://ccb.vermont.gov/>. The proposed rules will be updated on the website as they are amended during the rulemaking process. Final rules will be prominently displayed. The CCB has also assumed responsibility for administering the medical cannabis program, formerly housed within the Department of Public Safety. This program oversees and administers Vermont's therapeutic cannabis program, including dispensaries and the patient and caregiver registry.

This recently released [GUIDANCE DOCUMENT](#) is provided to assist municipalities working with individuals and businesses seeking to establish a cannabis business pursuant to 7 V.S.A. chapter 33. Click below for more information on the Cannabis Control Board:



Area Towns and Villages Receive Bylaw Modernization Grants

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) announced \$500,000 in Bylaw Modernization Grants to ensure that local land use regulations are aligned with the objective of promoting housing in our compact centers. The funding supports 23 projects in 41 municipalities to explore modernizing regulations and addressing the need for increased housing in downtowns, village centers, and surrounding neighborhoods.

"The most common housing constraints we hear about such as the cost of materials, limited workforce, and financing are irrelevant if you can't get a permit to build," said Agency of Commerce and Community Development Secretary Lindsay Kurrle. "This new grant program will help improve the local permitting process in cities and towns that want and need more housing."

Municipalities will use this new funding to hire a regional planning commission or consulting staff to collaborate with local stakeholders and prepare bylaw updates that expand opportunities for new homes, confront the State's housing crisis, and ready communities for unprecedented investments in housing and infrastructure.

"Local leaders across Vermont increasingly recognize that zoning can limit or prevent bringing new homes online that are close to jobs, served by ready infrastructure, and accessible to daily destinations and public transit options," said Housing and Community Development Commissioner Josh Hanford. Senator Michael Sirotkin added "Although zoning isn't the only market force constraining the supply of available homes, outdated regulations can increase the cost of housing, delay construction, make it harder for companies fill job openings, and will keep Vermont's economy from reaching its full potential."

Among the 23 funded projects, the BCRC coordinated a \$54,000 project with Shaftsbury, North Bennington, Old Bennington, Peru, Rupert, Sandgate, and Stamford to develop bylaw amendments that reduce regulatory barriers to housing development and bring bylaws into conformance with statute. The project implements the recent [Regional Housing Bylaw Survey](#). Areas of focus include development of accessory dwelling unit regulations, reduction of minimum parking requirements for dwelling units, and regulatory changes that will encourage more density and infill development in downtown and village centers.

The grants support the implementation of the Department's [Zoning for Great Neighborhoods](#) initiative of 2020, which produced a guide and model regulations designed to make little zoning updates that have a big impact. For a full listing of all grant awardees [click here](#).

Temporary Open Meeting Law Changes

Legislation recently signed by the Governor makes changes to the open meeting law similar to the changes that were in place during Vermont's state of emergency that ended last June. There are a few minor changes which are noted in the summary below.

- A public body may meet entirely by electronic or other means without being physically present.
- A physical meeting place where the public can attend is not necessary.
- Must use technology that allows the public to attend by electronic or other means.
- Must allow the public to access the meeting by telephone ~~whenever feasible~~ *(New from the last temporary change: Access to the meeting by telephone is required with no allowance for 'whenever feasible')*.
- Provide information on how to directly access the meeting electronically in the agenda *(New from the last temporary change: Clarification that all information to access the meeting must be included on the agenda. No extra steps, such as calling the town office for a password, should be required.)*
- Record their meetings (legislative body and school board).
- Time limit for posting meeting minutes may extend from five (5) to ten (10) calendar days if necessary due to staffing shortage.
- In addition to the municipal office, a municipal public body may post agendas and notices in two designated electronic locations in lieu of the two designated public places in the municipality (or in a combination of electronic and public place).
- Provide a copy of agenda/notice to newspaper in general circulation.

To read the whole S.222 Summary [click here](#).

New Food Resource Brochure Available

As part of his VISTA service with the BCRC, Jake Gesling produced a brochure listing a range of food resources available in the region, including: food banks, meal delivery services, financial assistance programs, and community meal sites. The brochure also includes QR codes that provide updated information on food bank locations and calendars, transportation services, and more. You can download and share a copy of the brochure from the BCRC's website: [Food Resources \(brcvt.org\)](http://FoodResources(brcvt.org)).

BCRC Welcomes Scott Grimm-Lyon

The newest member of the BCRC's team began work at the Commission on February 28. We are delighted to welcome Scott Grimm-Lyon to the region. Scott comes to southern Vermont from his previous position as executive director of a business improvement district in Brooklyn. His background includes extensive work in community engagement, comprehensive planning, and economic development. He is a graduate of the University at Albany and has a MS in City and Regional Planning from the Pratt Institute. While in New York, Scott served on the Board of Directors and Economic Development Committees of the NY Metro Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Scott will be providing program management services for the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance and working on a variety of planning and community development projects.

You can reach Scott at the BCRC offices at 210 South Street in Bennington: 802-442-0713 / scottgrimmlyon@brcvt.org.

Events and Opportunities....

Downtown Transportation Fund Grants (DTF) to support revitalization efforts in Designated Towns and eligible Designated Village Centers. See the 2022 [Downtown Transportation Fund](#) and [Clean Water Initiative Funding](#) for DTF Projects for eligibility, program guidance and application. The maximum grant amount is \$200,000 with a 20% match required. Projects must demonstrate the ability to start the project within 24 months and complete within 36 months. **Application Deadline: March 7, 2022 @ 5:00 p.m.**

Spring '22 webinar and training series from the Community Wildlife Program at Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

- ◆ Climate action-planning: What should towns do to address climate change?
- ◆ Reviewing your Town Plan & Regulations: Lessons Learned from our Comprehensive Review
- ◆ Reinvigorating your Conservation Commission:
- ◆ BioFinder Drop-in Help Sessions
- ◆ Environmental Leadership Training Unit 1
- ◆ Environmental Leadership Training Unit 2

Dates, registration and more information is available on the Program's [Trainings](#) page where you can also find a library of previously recorded sessions.

BCRC March Meeting: Lets Grow Kids * Bennington County Open Arms * ARPA updates. Thursday, March 17 at 5:30 PM; see page 1 for details and login information.

Multunit Dwelling Electric Vehicle Charging Grant Program: \$1,000,000 in funding is available to subsidize the cost of purchasing and installing Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations at rental properties to provide residents with at-home charging access. The grant program is an interagency effort between DHCD, the Agency of Transportation, Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Public Service Department. Grants will be awarded up to \$80,000 per site and \$300,000 per applicant, with priority grant awards given to affordable housing projects. **The deadline to apply is April 1, 2022.** For full details on the program visit: https://accd.vermont.gov/multiunit_dwelling.

[The Rural Energy Pilot Program \(REPP\) grant](#) can be used for:

- Community energy planning, capacity building, and technical assistance
- Energy efficiency and weatherization
- Installation and equipping of community-scale renewable energy technologies and systems

Here are the guidelines for community-scale renewable energy in the grant: *With respect to size, community energy includes projects between the sizes of approximately fifty kilowatts to two megawatts which is substantially less generation than utility-scale installations, but more generation than would be used by the typical single end user. Projects may be located on more than one site and have more than one user (e.g., solar panels or small- to medium-sized wind turbines could be installed on separate properties and sent to a common transformer, or the equipment could be constructed within a common area, such as a public park).* **Letter of intent is due by April 19. Completed applications are due July 18.**

Planning and Zoning Essentials Workshop for Municipal Officials. Presented via zoom by the BCRC on Thursday, April 21 from 4:30-6:00 PM. Zoom Meeting Info: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82181448644>
Meeting ID: 821 8144 8644 | Dial-in: +1 929 205 6099
Contact Catherine Bryars, BCRC Planning Director for more information: cbryars@bcrcvt.org.

In partnership with Vermont Agency of Transportation, and along with a number of other participating organizations and sponsors, the Addison County Regional Planning Commission, in concert with the Walk-Bike Council of Addison County will host the statewide **Vermont Walk/Bike Summit** at the Town Hall Theater in Middlebury, VT.

SAVE THE DATE! Friday, May 6th, 2022

Keynote Speaker: The Vermont Walk/Bike Summit welcomes **Don Kostelec**, principal at Vitruvian Planning in Boise, Idaho, and a 17-year veteran of transportation planning, health analysis, and comprehensive planning. His mission is to lift the citizens of our country and communities out of poor health and into healthier, happier, and more fulfilled lives through an improved built environment that promotes physical activity, social interaction, and emotional contentment. You can follow Don's work on Twitter [@KostelecPlan](#). For information about the summit, go to:

[Vermont Walk/Bike Summit 2022 – Vermont Walk/Bike Summit 2022 \(vtwalkbikesummit.com\)](#) .

2022 Southern Vermont Economy Summit: Cultivate Change. May 12, 2022 at Mount Snow. The 2022 Southern Vermont Economy Summit is a learning and networking event for municipal, community and business leaders that focuses on the long-term development of Southern Vermont's economy. It's a time for our region to gather, think big, learn something new, ask questions and connect. Visit the Summit website for updates and registration information: [Summit | SoVermont Zone](#) .

Save the Date: **BCRC Annual Meeting - Thursday, May 19.** IN-PERSON at the Manchester Town Office Meeting Room! Program details coming soon!

Competitive Infrastructure Funding Opportunities for Local Governments

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (aka Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) includes billions of dollars in competitive funding available to cities, towns, and municipalities across dozens of new and existing programs. A bulletin covering all program areas and providing contact information can be found at: [bil_factsheet_local_competitive_funding.pdf \(bcrcvt.org\)](#) .

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