



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

November 2021

November BCRC Meeting Looks at Outdoor Recreation in our Region and Southern Vermont CEDS Project Reviews

This month's meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission will take place via ZOOM (login information below; if you would like to attend in-person we will have someone at the BCRC office conference room) on Thursday, November 18 at 5:30 PM. The meeting will begin with information on "CEDS" projects. Since 2019, the Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, has served as the guiding document for collaborative development efforts in Bennington and Windham counties. One of the distinguishing features of the Southern Vermont CEDS is the annual "project review" process, through which businesses, nonprofits, municipalities, entrepreneurs, and others can share information about new initiatives and ongoing efforts to enhance our region's economic competitiveness and community cohesion. This approach maintains the relevance and accessibility of the CEDS, and also allows BCRC staff and our colleagues in Windham County to work closely with project champions to meet their goals, celebrate their achievements, and target additional resources.



Photo from the [Dorset Outdoor Recreation Master Plan](#)

We'll then turn our attention to some exciting outdoor recreation efforts that affect the quality of life and economic vitality of our region. **Jared Newell** of the [Bennington Area Trails System](#) (BATS) will discuss the use of their growing network of trails in the Southshire while **Rachel Batz**, the Town of Dorset's Outdoor Recreation Director, will describe the town's new [Outdoor Recreation Master Plan](#) and efforts to develop and promote trails in that town. We'll also hear from **Martina Barnes**, District Ranger for our region of the [Green Mountain National Forest](#), about the many resources available in those vast public lands and recent plans and projects of interest to resi-

dents. There will be ample time for questions and answers; this meeting affords a great opportunity to learn from local and regional recreation leaders and apply what they have learned—so feel free to invite anyone in your community who may have an interest.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82049093390>

Call in: 1 929 205 6099 — Meeting ID: 820 4909 3390

WindowDressers Community Builds are Here!



Earlier this year, several local energy committee members and other interested citizens formed a Bennington County chapter of WindowDressers with support from the BCRC. WindowDressers is a nonprofit organization based in Maine with chapters all over New England. Their mission is to provide low-cost insulating window inserts to help people use less heat and stay warm in the winter. Customers order their inserts and then participate in a community build where the inserts are assembled by a group of volunteers.

Bennington County WindowDressers will be holding two build events in November, one in the Southshire and one in the Northshire. Both the Northshire and Southshire teams have been working hard doing outreach, collecting orders, measuring windows and fundraising. The teams have received grants from the New England Grassroots Fund, Stratton Foundation, the Fund for North Bennington, and others to help cover the cost of inserts for low-income households. Some of the grant funds also will be used to provide inserts to local community organizations including the Arlington Commons and the Rupert Congregational Church.

The Southshire build will take place November 4-9 at the Benn High auditorium and the Northshire build will take place November 11-15 at the Arlington Common. There are still a few volunteer slots remaining. Volunteers can sign-up [here](#) for the Southshire event, and [here](#) for the Northshire event. More information about WindowDressers can be found at www.windowdressers.org.

Sign Up for a Heat Squad Energy Audit!

HEAT Squad helps Bennington County homeowners save on their energy bills, making homes warm and affordable. We work with you every step of the way to complete your weatherization projects, starting with a home energy audit. Your audit report received shortly after the audit will recommend weatherization projects that are eligible for rebates and prioritized based on your concerns and budget.

Eligible measures include air sealing (minimum 10% air infiltration reduction) and insulation (attic, basement and/or wall). Additional measures may include vapor barriers, bath fans and ventilation, attic and basement hatches, heat pump technology, and health and safety repairs. When eligible measures are completed, and the homeowner verifies income, Efficiency Vermont rebates cover 50% of weatherization project cost up to \$3000 for income-eligible and up to \$1000 for others. HEAT Squad does all the work to apply for rebates so you can receive your check. **Call to get on the HEAT Squad audit schedule now; slots are filling up, and contractors are getting busy!** Find out more about our program, rebates, in-house affordable financing options, and how to apply. Contact HEAT Squad at <https://www.heatsquad.org/> or call 802-438-2303. You can also contact the BCRC energy coordinator for more information at cfishburn@bcrcvt.org or 802-442-0713 x309.



LEPCs to REMCs – What Does this Mean for My Town or Village?

There has been a change in the organization of emergency management functions in Vermont with a transition from Local Emergency Planning Committees, or LEPCs, to Regional Emergency Management Committees, or REMCs. Why the name change? Because the hazmat component, a requirement of the LEPC, has been removed from local committees and moved to a statewide committee. Therefore, LEPCs on a local level no longer exist in Vermont.

If you attended LEPC #7 meetings, you will soon notice how similar they were to the new REMC meetings. We will focus on regional emergency management and planning needs, host speakers from various Emergency Management sectors, discuss regional capabilities, and provide opportunities to collaborate with emergency management directors (EMDs), emergency service personnel, and those interested in emergency management and planning.

The BCRC will help schedule, plan, and facilitate the quarterly meetings, but towns and villages will need to appoint an EMD and someone from emergency services (fire, rescue, or law enforcement) to represent each town and village as voting members. Voting items include electing a chair and vice chair, financial matters, selecting a representative to attend statewide meetings or workshops, adopting bylaws, and other committee business. Non-voting members may include representatives from transportation, hospitals, DOH, media, and any interested individual or organization – all are welcome to attend.

The EMD may appoint the EMC to be the representative at REMC meetings, and the appointed emergency service representative can give their proxy to the EMD/C to attend on their behalf, if needed. The EMD/C would then vote for two people. If there is not a second representative or an assigned proxy, the municipality has fewer votes than others. Please reach out for more details on how to identify REMC representatives for your municipality. Please send Allison Strohl (astrohl@bcrcvt.org) the names of your town and village REMC representatives once they are identified.

State Fiscal Recovery Programs

Vermont is in the foundational stages of establishing State Fiscal Recovery Fund programs and their component projects. The Vermont legislature has appropriated many of the funds to priorities around the state. These state ARPA programs are described at:

[State Fiscal Recovery Plan—Overview of Appropriations](#)

Entities responsible for establishing specific projects within these legislatively appropriated programs are currently working to identify appropriate specific projects (including evidence-based projects) within these appropriations and to establish details of how the projects will be structured and administered. As individual projects are identified they may be assigned different Expenditure Categories than their initial assignment for the purposes of this Report. The State of Vermont Recovery Plan Performance Report in future years will include more details on these programs, their component projects, required key performance indicators, and other performance metrics as required by both the Treasury and the state.

BCRC Adds ARPA Resources Page to Website

Under the American Rescue Plan Act, Vermont will receive over \$1.25 billion of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funding. \$200 million has been directed to Vermont's cities, towns, and villages, with nearly \$11 million coming to Bennington County. A new section of the BCRC's website is designed to help municipal officials by providing updated information on ARPA funds, links to reports and webinars, and important contacts. Access the website at:



[ARPA Resources - BCRC \(bcrcvt.org\)](#)

Vermont Watershed Projects Database

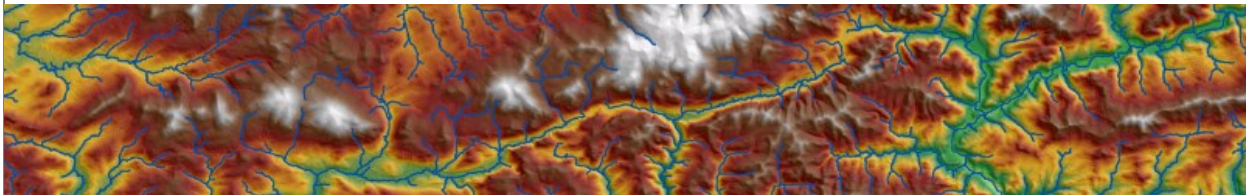
Basin 1: Batten Kill, Walloomsac and Hoosic Projects Submittals

Using a grant provided through Section 604(B) of the Clean Water Act, the Bennington County Regional Commission has launched a multi-pronged outreach effort to improve water quality in the region. The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation is the grantor of these funds.

As part of this effort, the BCRC will add into the [Vermont Watersheds Project Database](#) (VWPD) those projects identified in recently adopted municipal stormwater master plans and riparian habitat restoration and buffer planting projects initiated by the BCRC and its partners. Projects assigned identification numbers in the Vermont Watersheds Project Database are eligible for project funding through the Vermont Clean Water Program, Ecosystem Restoration Program, and other grant programs.

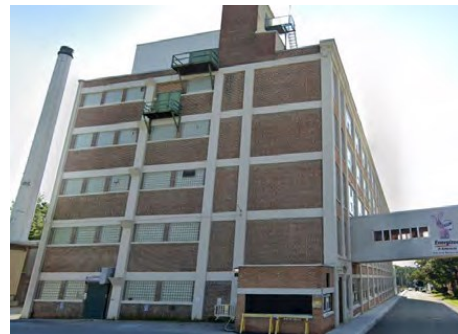
Two projects identified in the Sandgate Stormwater Master Plan were entered into the VWPA. These projects upgraded five 15-inch culverts to 18 inch culverts, replaced an undersized 6-foot boiler plate culvert with a box culvert, and constructed numerous sections of stone line ditching. One project identified in North Bennington will replace a 6-foot undersized and broken galvanized culvert with a box culvert.

The BCRC also has added into the VWPD numerous clean water projects that have been identified and developed in conjunction with its clean water partners, including the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, The Hoosic River Watershed Association, and The Bennington County Conservation District. These projects include six riparian habitat restoration/buffer plantings along the Green River in Sandgate, five along the Batten Kill in Arlington, one along the Mettawee River in Rupert, two along the Walloomsac River and Lake Paran in North Bennington, and two along the Hoosic River in Pownal. Another project entered was an effort to stabilize the toe of a landslide in Pownal by planting trees and shrubs. In total 23 projects were entered into the VWPD. The BCRC also assisted the regional watershed planner by updating the status of existing projects in the VWPD to show that they have been completed.



BCRC Completes Energizer Reuse Study

The BCRC worked with the Town of Bennington and Camoin Associates to complete a reuse study of the recently closed Energizer facility. The project was undertaken to provide the Town of and its residents with a plan to inform potential uses of the Energizer facility, located in a key area just north of the downtown. The plan contains an inventory of the site and its assets, a review of zoning and environmental factors, and a housing and market analysis. The plan then places this analysis in the context of broader demographic and economic trends, concluding with an evaluation of redevelopment options and feasibility. Additional input, collected from a public survey and a public meeting conducted by the BCRC in the summer of 2021, as well as interviews conducted by Camoin Associates, informs the report's conclusions and recommended next steps. Download the study at: [Energizer Reuse Study](#).



Building Communities Grant Awards

Two Regional Economic Development Grants were recently awarded to the BCRC to support organizations in our local communities. These grants are designed to help cover capital costs associated with the development of facilities reasonably expected to create or retain job opportunities in Vermont communities. Projects must promote financial engagement in either an individual community or recognized community service area. With a 1:1 match, grants of up to \$25,000 are awarded as funding for permitted, shovel-ready projects. Project selected in our region this year include:

\$25,000.00 to NB Children’s Center, Inc. for facility renovations and fit-up to create a new and licensed Early Education Center including: installation of an air ventilation/filtration system, fire suppression system, split HVAC units, kitchen equipment, washer and dryer.

\$15,000.00 to Ellenbogen Gallery, LLC to complete exterior and interior renovations to the art gallery, including sheetrock, painting, and lighting.

Arlington Commons wins Energy Grant for Lighting

Working with Efficiency Vermont, the BCRC, representing one of Vermont’s twelve regional development corporations, helped Arlington Commons receive a \$40,000 grant to upgrade lighting at this former Catholic Church property. Arlington Commons, site of the recent statewide housing forum (see below) is working to convert the buildings on the site to a community-centered performance, events, fitness, and multi-purpose co-working space.



Smart Growth Principles Discussed at Housing Forum

The BCRC helped Representatives Bongartz and James organize a forum on housing development in Vermont that was attended by approximately 70 people from around the state. The BCRC’s executive director, Jim Sullivan, participated in one panel discussion that focused on “Smart Growth” principles and the recently released [Enabling Better Places Guide](#).

Watch the panel discussion courtesy of GNAT-TV:

[The Vermont Housing Summit – Panel 2: Smart Growth Principles – GNAT \(gnat-tv.org\)](#) .

Vermont Business Relief Program Receives National Award

Vermont’s Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) received a 2021 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). This national award recognizes the 12 RDCs of Vermont that make up the state’s economic development network, for the innovative Restart Vermont Technical Assistance Program (ReVTA). During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, ReVTA provided 512 businesses and non-profits with technical assistance, 401 of which also received grants that enabled them to recover from the pandemic impacts and pivot toward the future.

Bennington County Economy Featured in Vermont Business Magazine Article

For a great article on our regional economic recovery, check out this article, featuring an interview with BCRC Assistant Director, Bill Colvin: [Bennington County Economy](#).

Events and Opportunities....

Bylaw Modernization Grants: The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has \$500,000 available to grant to municipalities for land use, development, and zoning bylaw updates. This one time bylaw funding is a great opportunity for municipalities to make targeted updates to their bylaw to promote housing choice and affordability, or address more comprehensive changes to do the same. Changes that promote housing choice and affordability are varied and can include dimensional standards and density, allowed uses, parking standards, housing types, accessory dwellings, and streamlining the development review process. For more information, [click here to see the program description.](#) The BCRC already is working with a consortium of local communities to develop a proposal for funding. Applications to the bylaw modernization grant are due **November 15, 2021.** For more information, contact Cat Bryars at the BCRC: cbryars@bcrcvt.org.

The 2021 Farm to Plate Gathering will be hosted virtually on Thursday, November 18th from 9:30am to 5:00pm and Friday, November 19th from 9:00am-1:00pm: Explore inspiring efforts across the state that are bringing the 2021-2030 Strategic Plan to life, get practical information to help your organization, farm, or food business, and unveil the next iteration of the Farm to Plate Network and how we can work collectively to implement strategic priorities over the next decade. Click [here](#) to register and see the full agenda. There is a flat fee of \$45 to register for the Gathering regardless of number of sessions/days attended.

November Meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission: Outdoor Recreation and CEDS projects. **November 18** at 5:30 PM via ZOOM. See page one for details.

There is approximately \$70,000 in funding available to offer a second round of enrollment for **Grant-In-Aid Equipment Purchases** to municipalities that were previously eligible to enroll, but didn't make a purchase. Check here for the updated [letter of intent](#) and the [eligibility list](#). Letters are due November 19; contact Jim Henderson at the BCRC for more information: jhenderson@bcrcvt.org.

VTrans is pleased to announce that they are now accepting grant applications for the SFY 2022 **Transportation Alternatives Program.** This year, Transportation Alternatives Program funding (roughly \$2.2 million) is available for all eligible activities as described in the [Vermont Transportation Alternatives Fall 2021 Application Guide](#) per the link below. **Applications are due by e-mail by Wednesday, November 24, 2021.** <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/transport-alt>

December 4: Virtual VECAN Conference -- The 14th Annual Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN) Conference will be held virtually for the second year in a row. The conference will kick off as usual on the first Saturday of December—**December 4**, followed by workshop sessions throughout the following week. Stay tuned for more details to come!

Vermont Urban and Community Forest Grants: The intent of the [Resilient Urban Forests for All Assistance Package](#) is to support and grow downtown trees and forests in Vermont's most populated areas in partnership with communities that lack capacity and need assistance to advance their urban forestry programs. VT UCF is seeking two urban municipal partners willing to utilize a technical and financial assistance (financial assistance in the form of a \$10,000 grant and technical assistance valued at \$10,000) to invest in their urban forest. A \$2,500 cash or in-kind municipal match is required.

Additionally, municipalities are eligible for funding from the [Growing Urban Forests in the Face of Emerald Ash Borer](#) tree planting and tree nursery grant program focused on urban areas that will lose ash tree canopy cover and are ready or planning to replant other tree species. Grants are for

between \$3,000 and \$15,000 and require an equal municipal match in funds or in-kind services.

Lastly, all Vermont municipalities will be eligible for **Caring for Canopy Grants**. This application has not been released yet but should be within the coming weeks. [Here is a link](#) to the 2020 application and likely where the 2022 applications will be posted.

The Preservation Trust of Vermont is pleased to announce the opening of the **2022 Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants**. PTV is particularly interested in projects that aim to increase the economic vitality of a community through non-profit ownership of general stores or other businesses, add housing to downtowns, or bring new economic and community activity to village centers. Awards of \$50,000-\$100,000 will be made based on regional distribution, variety of project type, community and economic development potential, and the capacity of the active, local working group. A total of \$525,000 will be awarded to nonprofits and municipalities in towns with populations less than 7,500 people. This project is supported through a grant from the Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program as administered by the National Park Service Department of the Interior. Click [here](#) for more information.

The **Vermont Arts Council** is now offering a funding opportunity for communities that are poised to integrate works of public art into upcoming infrastructure projects through its [Animating Infrastructure Grant](#) program. The Council seeks proposals for projects that provide opportunities for artists to engage with community in the design and/or fabrication of permanent or temporary public art for an interior or exterior site that is accessible to the public. Grants of up to \$15,000 are available. Letters of Interest are due December 16, 2021.

The Citizens for a Greater Bennington (CFGB) is currently accepting proposals for funding projects that support the long-term economic vitality of downtown Bennington, Vermont. CFGB expects to grant up to \$35,000 in 2021 for economic development projects. Non-profit 501c(3) organizations or municipalities are eligible to apply for funding. Individuals or businesses with viable projects that support the economic vitality of downtown Bennington may be able to partner with a nonprofit or municipality and submit a proposal as a team. The Request for Proposals can be found online here: <https://ptvermont.org/?p=12693> or by emailing meg@ptvermont.org. Proposals due December 31, 2021.

American Rescue Plan information for Municipal Officials from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns: [American Rescue Plan Act | Vermont League of Cities and Towns \(vlct.org\)](#). This information also can be accessed through BCRC's website: [BCRC - Home \(bcrct.org\)](#). Contact [Callie Fishburn](#) or [Allison Strohl](#) at the BCRC for more information.

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