



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

July 2020

BCRC July Meeting and Public Hearings

With relatively few meeting venues available that could accommodate us and in the interest of providing a safe forum for discussion, the regular meeting of the BCRC will be held via ZOOM at 5:30 PM on July 16. The meeting will include public hearings to consider four municipal plan approvals: Arlington, Dorset, Manchester, and Shaftsbury. Arlington and Dorset completed a comprehensive plan updates including enhanced energy elements, Manchester's plan update focused primarily on an enhanced energy element, and Shaftsbury completed a general comprehensive update. The plans and reviews of conformance with statutory provisions are available on the BCRC's website: www.bcrcvt.org.

The meeting also will include a discussion of proposed BCRC Bylaw amendments dealing with municipal representation on the commission and voting procedures. The Bylaws with amendments highlighted also are available on our website.

Public hearing notices will be published and will include log-in and call-in information. You can also contact Jim Sullivan (jsullivan@bcrcvt.org or 802-753-7831) to receive copies of the documents and information needed to join the meeting.

BCRC Work Continues

The BCRC has continued its work in all program areas during this most unusual time and everyone remains available to provide support to local officials and our many partner organizations. Of course, considerable staff time has been refocused on providing direct support for businesses, organizations, and local governments that are struggling to deal with the effects of the pandemic. The best way to contact a staff member is via email—please see the contact information below or check our website, www.bcrcvt.org.

The BCRC also continues to update the COVID-19 Response section of our website. Anyone looking for information related to public health, business support and funding programs, food security, local government operations, ways to help meet specific community needs, and more, should go to: <http://www.bcrcvt.org/covid-19-resources.html>.

BCRC Staff Emails

Mark Anders, Transportation Program Manager: manders@bcrcvt.org

Michael Batcher, Solid Waste Program Manager/Regional Planner: mbatcher@bcrcvt.org

Catherine Bryars, Senior Planner: cbryars@bcrcvt.org

Bill Colvin, Community and Economic Development Director: bcolvin@bcrcvt.org

Jonathan Cooper, Community and Economic Development Specialist: jcooper@bcrcvt.org

Stacey Eggsware, Financial Director: seggsware@bcrcvt.org

Jim Henderson, Environmental Program Manager: jhenderson@bcrcvt.org

Allison Strohl, Emergency Management Program Manager: astrohl@bcrcvt.org

Jim Sullivan, Director: jsullivan@bcrcvt.org

Emergency Shelters during COVID-19

COVID-19 precautions are becoming our daily normal: We wear masks in public buildings, we are physically distancing, and we keep our social circles small. Vermont numbers have remained low compared to surrounding states, and in turn, restrictions are slowly being relaxed. With businesses starting to reopen and summer making life feel more normal, it is easy to just continue what we have been doing. However, it is important to look ahead and plan ahead to prevent possible COVID-19 outbreaks. Some scenarios that could lead to an outbreak are unavoidable, but others, such as sheltering, require some advance planning.



Sheltering is a particularly important consideration at this time because NOAA has predicted an [above-normal hurricane season for 2020](#), and severe weather including thunderstorms and flooding is always a possibility. How would your municipality handle sheltering when physical distancing is a must? What can your municipality do now to be better prepared?

The FEMA guidance document [COVID-19 Pandemic Operational Guidance for the 2020 Hurricane Season](#), offers an abundance of helpful information and several checklists to help municipalities plan for sheltering during COVID-19. Furthermore, the article [With Summer Heat Waves, Hurricanes, and Flooding on the Horizon, Disaster Responders Grapple with Planning for Extreme Weather in the Time of COVID-19](#) offers some good insight and discusses other issues that could arise. Here are some questions and suggestions to start planning for emergency shelters.

Questions About Current Assigned Shelters

- Are your current assigned shelters still available during COVID-19?
- Are any of the assigned shelters in schools that are being used for food distribution or other services? If so, they may not be able to shelter anyone.
- Are there new requirements for shelters that need to be met before being used? Such as sanitation and health screenings?
- Will municipalities need to provide cleaning materials, physical distancing barriers, health screening equipment, PPE for volunteers? Where is all of this going to be stored?
- Will there be a mask requirement for people staying in the shelter?
- Are your shelter volunteers still available? Are they aware of all new requirements? Are there plans to have an exercise?

Suggestions for Alternate Shelters

- Arranging non-congregate housing for temporary sheltering instead of assigned shelters (possible PA funding eligible if during a declared disaster), such as motels and hotels.
- If it is a small-scale event, could multiple shelters be opened? Could municipalities develop agreements with surrounding towns to open multiple shelters in order to have fewer people staying in one location?
- Will transportation need to be arranged if shelters are located out of town?

Suggestions for Communication with Community Members

- Provide guidance about hurricane season and tips for preparing at home.
- Let community members know to only evacuate to shelters if there is not an option to stay at home or with family/friends.
- Let community members know that assigned shelters may not open this year, or that they may be in different locations.

Make sure community members know where to get current information on where shelters will be or where non-congregate housing will be, and how to access it.
Provide VT 211 current sheltering information.
Make sure community members know to bring face coverings to shelters.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach for sheltering during COVID-19. What works best for one municipality may not work well for another. Additionally, a small-scale event with a handful of families that need sheltering would be easier to assist while maintaining physical distancing requirements. Meanwhile, an Irene-sized storm with many families needing sheltering, would make physical distancing in shelters nearly impossible – especially without proper planning.

If your municipality would like assistance with this discussion, please reach out to Allison Strohl at astrohl@bcrcvt.org. The BCRC, along with Vermont Emergency Management, would be happy to help answer any questions and to assist with shelter planning efforts.

COVID-19 Local Support and Community Action Team Report

The Governor's Local Support and Community Action Team has released an

[Interim Report to the Governor](#)

following a series of meetings and input from over 3,500 Vermonters. The report includes detailed preliminary recommendations around housing, child care, local food access, business support and recovery, broadband, and more as well as a list of next stage action steps to drive them forward. The Action Team will now transition to conducting a series of regional meetings to deepen understanding of the needs across the state, and remains committed to harnessing collective creativity to help drive forward recovery.

For more information, please contact: Paul Costello: pcostello@vtrural.org at the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

Guidelines for the Use of Public Highways for Outdoor Eating, Retail, and Public Gathering Spaces

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development worked with the Vermont Agency of Transportation on a toolkit to help restaurants and municipalities evaluate whether to make streets, rights of way and other public infrastructure available for outdoor dining. This document provides guidance on how a portion of a state or town public highway can be used on a temporary basis for outdoor eating, retail activities, and social gatherings to help achieve the physical distancing recommendations intended to stop the spread of the Coronavirus. For this guidance, these areas are referred to collectively as “temporary public gathering spaces”. It describes the options available, issues that need to be considered, the municipal and state approval processes, and provides links to resources with additional information. It provides an orientation on the topic and is not a design guide or standard. The Guidelines are available at the ACCD website:



[GUIDELINES FOR USING ROADWAYS](#) .

COVID-19 Response – BCRC Community & Economic Development Efforts

Following Governor Scott’s first Executive Order of on March 13th, the BCRC’s Community and Economic Development Department rapidly shifted most of its efforts to assisting regional businesses in responding to the new challenges related to the pandemic and corresponding shutdowns. From mid-March to mid-June, the BCRC engaged with over 240 businesses. In general, the engagements involved supporting the businesses in one or more of three general categories:

1. Understanding qualifications for essential business status/compliance with Exec. Orders
2. Unemployment insurance issues/understanding new rules
3. Funding – SBA, PPP, EIDL, other

The BCRC established a dedicated COVID-related webpage which was updated multiple times per day with new information and resources for businesses, municipalities and the community at large; worked closely with the RDCs of Vermont on response and legislative issues; was on the steering committee to advise the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center in standing up an online manufacturing exchange for the development of personal protective equipment; monitored and participated in ACCD and partners twice-weekly update call; coordinated Southern Vermont response efforts with BDCC; did a series of public outreach programs on local access television in the Northshire and Southshire and Facebook Live to update the community on response efforts; and worked with the Graduate Resilience Institute at Northeastern University as one of three pilot communities developing a comprehensive emergency response planning effort set up through FEMA Region 1.

The Scott administration has proposed a specific plan for using federal CARES funding to support economic recovery and is working with the Legislature to develop a final funding package. More information on those proposals can be found at: <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/vermont-economic-recovery-and-relief-package>

For information on our regional response or resources available for a specific business, contact Bill Colvin, the Commission’s Director of Economic Development at bcolvin@bcrcvt.org.

Putnam Block Redevelopment

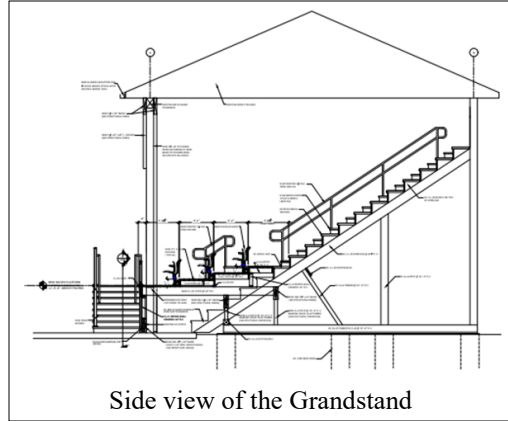
As with other construction projects throughout Vermont, the Putnam Block Redevelopment was shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March. The project ramped down to a total closure for approximately six weeks. Contractors began to return to the site per state guidance in May. At the time of the shutdown approximately 100 workers were on site on a typical day. As of mid-June that number was back up to around 70. It is estimated that the site closure will result in about a three-month delay in project completion. It is still anticipated that the buildings will be ready for tenant fit-up by late November and that some residential tenants may move in before the end of 2020.



Major Improvements Underway at Manchester's Dana L. Thompson Memorial Park

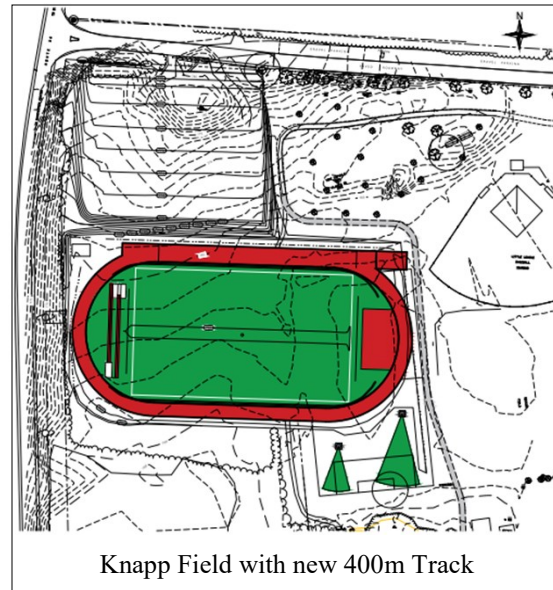
There are a lot of great projects in the works at Manchester's outstanding municipal recreation center. Here is an update from Town Manager, John O'Keefe. Congratulations to Manchester on investing in this work to make a great facility even better!

Upgrade to the Applejack Grandstand: Work will include removal of 5 of the 11 front uprights to open up the view for spectators as well as construction of three rows of premium stadium seating (complete with cupholders) for a total of 136 seats. An ADA lift and five ADA seating spaces and better handrails and steps to the bleacher seating will improve accessibility. Lighting inside the Grandstand was greatly enhanced last fall. The project is funded with \$40,000 from the 2020 Town Bond and a \$100,000 grant.



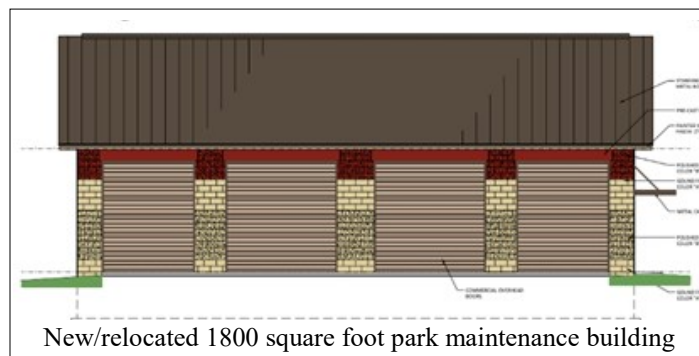
Side view of the Grandstand

Knapp Field and Running Track: Thanks to a partnership with Burr and Burton Academy and the generosity of Town Meeting (which approved \$160,000 to buy an additional 7 acres of land), Clark Company is building a new rubberized 400-meter running track, complete with shotput and discus areas, high jump, long jump and pole vault pits. The project also includes a new, realigned Knapp Field. Knapp Field will be bigger (about 120 yards by 73 yards) and will have a much improved playing surface (crowned and sodded). It is planned to be operational for this fall. The upper part of the former church land will serve as a parking area for Knapp Field, the new track and larger events like tournaments. With the additional of the new Knapp Field, the Park now boasts four full-size athletic fields. The upcoming Town operating budget includes funding to plant trees around the field and between the field and Route 30 / Bonnet Street.



Knapp Field with new 400m Track

New Park Maintenance Facility: This new building will be located at the end of the Park access road. The project is currently out to bid and we hope to have the project done before September. The building was designed to last; it's built out of masonry block and has a standing seam roof. This project, estimated at \$350,000, is being funded through the 2020 Town Improvement Bond.



New/relocated 1800 square foot park maintenance building

The multifaceted project also includes improvements to the park entrance, pedestrian facilities, lighting, and expanded and rearranged parking areas.

News from the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance

The mission of the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance is to reduce the amount of waste disposed in landfills, by incineration or similar means by 1) reducing the amount of waste generated, 2) conserving resources, and 3) promoting recycling and reuse. The Alliance consists of the towns of Arlington, Bennington, Dorset, Glastenbury, Manchester, Pownal, Rupert, Sandgate, Searsburg, Shaftsbury, Stamford, Sunderland, and Woodford. For more information, please visit www.bcswavt.org or contact Michael S. Batcher at (802) 442-0713 x 2 or mbatcher@bcrcvt.org.

Food Scrap Ban: As of July 1, 2020, food waste will be banned from disposal in landfills. Residents, institutions, businesses and schools should divert their food waste by contracting with their haulers, bringing food to their transfer stations, composting, feeding food scraps to domestic animals, donating to food banks and/or reducing the amount purchased to avoid wasting food. Haulers are required to offer collection for businesses, schools, institutions, and apartments of four units or more so contact your hauler for assistance.

Bring Your Own Bag: After July 1, 2020, stores and food service establishments will no longer provide plastic carryout bags at check-out. Plastic bags will be allowed in stores and food service establishments for containing certain materials (e.g., fruits, vegetables, nuts, coffee, hardware items, frozen foods, meat, fish, prescription medications) or for laundry, dry cleaning, and other large garments. Stores and food service establishments may provide paper carryout bags at check-out, for a minimum of \$0.10 each. Paper bags will be allowed in stores and food service establishments for packaging loose items within a store, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, coffee, grains, bakery goods, candy, greeting cards, or small hardware items

After July 1, 2020, food service establishments will no longer offer **plastic straws** to customers, though they may provide straws made from alternative materials or if a customer requests a straw. Plastic stirrers are also banned though stirrers made of alternative materials can be provided.

After July 1, 2020, stores and food service establishments will no longer provide or sell food or beverage containers made of expanded **polystyrene** including plates and cups, trays, egg cartons, and take-out containers. Expanded polystyrene is still allowed for trays used to package uncooked meat, fish, poultry, or seafood, products packaged out-of-state or packaged for sale out-of-state.

2020 Household Hazardous Waste Events: The Alliance will hold two events in late summer. On August 8, 2020, we will hold an event at the Mt. Anthony Union Middle School and on September 12, 2020, we will hold an event at the Dorset School. Both events will run from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Contact Michael Batcher at mbatcher@bcrcvt.org, or (802) 442-0713 x2 if you have questions. For more information, visit www.bcswavt.org.

Business, School and Event Outreach: The Alliance continues to provide outreach to businesses, schools, and event organizers. This free service provides information on methods of recycling, disposing hazardous materials, and properly diverting food scraps and organics from landfills. If your school, business or institution or event is interested in having someone contact you to discuss better ways to handle solid waste, organics, recyclables, and other materials, please contact Michael Batcher at 802-442-0713 x 2 or mbatcher@bcrcvt.org.



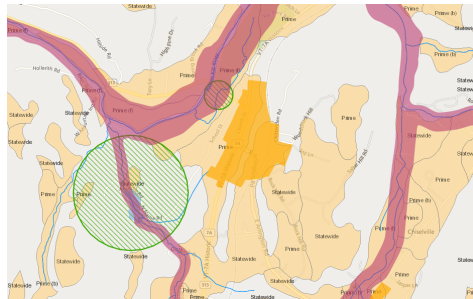
New Planning Data Available

New planning and visualization tools now available on [DHCD's Planning Atlas](#) by clicking both the box next to the **Built Environment** category and the "+":

Building Footprints (UVM SAL Landcover 2016) – display striking visuals of settlement patterns

Wastewater Infrastructure (Best Available) – some data is missing but still these are useful compilations: Wastewater Service Area * Detailed Wastewater Mapping Status * Wastewater Infrastructure (Point features) * Wastewater Infrastructure (Linear features)

Connectivity: Broadband Status 2019 * Cable Systems 2019 * Fiber Systems 2019



Those with a little GIS skill can access these data sets through the [Vermont Open Geodata Portal](#).

=====

Also, you can find some useful data in [the Municipal Planning Database](#):

Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws – statewide list of plan and regulatory status of municipalities, updated annually in October with data provided by the regional planning commissions

Designation Program – current status of all state designations with expiration dates, etc., updated as status changes

Municipal Planning Grant Projects – a compilation of past municipal planning grant projects, curated to offer components that may be useful to other municipalities – updated as time allows

Funding Awarded for Bennington Family Housing Project

The Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) Board of Commissioners recently announced the award of federal and state housing tax credits and loans to support the development, rehabilitation, or preservation of 104 permanently affordable apartments in six communities across the state.

Projects receiving funding include Bennington Family Housing, a collaboration between Shires Housing and the Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless. Shires Housing will acquire and rehabilitate an existing historic building on Pleasant Street as the new site of the Thatcher House Family Shelter. The renovated building will offer nine apartments for households transitioning out of homelessness, paired with on-site supportive services. The project received federal and state tax credits and a construction loan.



The future site of Bennington Family Housing. Courtesy of Shires Housing

Southern Vermont CEDS 2020 Vital Project Rankings Announced

The 2020 project rankings for the Southern Vermont Economy CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) have been announced. A total of 59 projects were submitted to be included in the five-year plan for growing the southern Vermont economy, twelve of which have been ranked vital. The purpose of identifying Vital Projects is to publicly acknowledge the top actions our region can support that will make demonstrable progress towards our regional economic development goals, as outlined in the 2019 Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). This CEDS was created in 2018 and 2019 through dozens of meetings with stakeholders, through a process led by the grassroots SeVEDS (Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies of Windham) and RED (Regional Economic Development of Bennington) Groups. The CEDS establishes measurable goals, objectives, and a clear set of strategies. While every project submitted becomes part of the annual CEDS, projects which best demonstrate the ability to advance those goals garnered the most support. These are the Vital Projects.

Projects in the Bennington Region include:

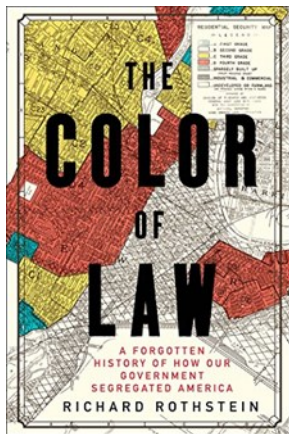
Putnam Block Redevelopment Phase 2: The Putnam Block Redevelopment - Phase 2 will build upon the momentum of Phase 1 of the project now under construction. Phase 1 of the project brought revitalized three, historic, iconic and mostly vacant buildings in the heart of downtown Bennington. Putnam Block Redevelopment Phase 2 will continue to add much needed vitality to the heart of the community, bringing in additional workers, patients, students, and others to use office and educational spaces and providing housing for an additional thirty families in the urban core. The \$24 MM project calls for remediation of a four-acre Brownfield site and construction of a new, five-story building approximately 50,000 SF in size.

Shirenomics: A growing and ambitious vehicle for regional economic and community development professionals to help shape the narrative around southwestern Vermont and generate public interest in ongoing developments. The target audience is people interested in the region: longtime residents, newcomers, and people who are considering a move. The project is a collaboration of Matt Harrington of the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce and Jonathan Cooper of the Bennington County Regional Commission. Through a newsletter/e-zine, video series, and in-the-works podcast, Shirenomics provides content that can be consumed and shared across a variety of platforms, and gives its audience several ways to engage with the region.

Southern Vermont Communications Union District: The Southern Vermont Communication Union District (SoVT CUD) was created by twelve Bennington County towns at the ballot box on Town Meeting Day in 2020. It aims to bring broadband Internet service to under-served areas of those towns, and to provide businesses and residences throughout the county with a new option for service. The lack of broadband Internet service is a major restraint on the growth of the region's economy and its efforts to attract people and business to our region. The SoVT CUD has the funding in place to conduct a feasibility study and formulate a business plan, and will partner with an internet service provider shortly thereafter to deliver on its mission.

Southern-Vermont Region-Wide Projects:

- ◆ The Southern Vermont Economy Summit: a daylong learning and networking event for municipal, community and business leaders that focuses on the long-term development of Southern Vermont's economy. This is truly a Southern Vermont focused event, striving to bring insight, knowledge, expertise, and connections to the community members, businesses, and organizations that serve our region.
- ◆ Leveraging the Vermont Brand: The purpose of this project is to assist the public and private sectors in understanding how better to leverage the Vermont brand in their own efforts to recruit and retain talent, to attract entrepreneurs and investment, and to grow market share for Vermont businesses and services. This project will create new tools, data, collaboration, and strategies that can help communities and companies alike in their efforts to attract people and entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Developing New Markets & Infrastructure to Support Vermont Farmers: Working with Food Connects to dramatically increasing sales capacity to reach new customers and markets throughout the Northeast and develop new strategic partnerships within Vermont to leverage greater impact.



Want to Learn More about the Intersection of Racism and Urban Planning?

A great place to start is to pick up a copy of the book [‘The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America’ \(2017\)](#) in which author Richard Rothstein argues that local, state, and federal housing policies – such as the practice of redlining – exacerbated racial inequality in ways that Americans are still dealing with today. If you’re interested but looking for a shorter soundbite, check out [‘Segregated by Design’](#) an 18-minute short film currently streaming for free online that summarizes the history that the book chronicles. BCRC staff [Cat Bryars](#) will be reading ‘The Color of Law’ this month, so drop her a line if you’d like to exchange additional resources on race and professional planning.

Events and Opportunities....

For COVID-19 related business, nonprofit, local government, and public assistance information, funding opportunities, and suggestions for donating to service organizations go to:

[BCRC COVID-19 Resource Directory](#)



Complete AARP Cycling Survey by October 31, 2020: AARP-VT is compiling data about cycling and people age 50 or older in order to inform local leaders, transportation practitioners and community members so they can encourage and plan for better and safer bicycling experiences for people of all ages. The experiences and preferences of older bicycle riders can inform local leaders about the cycling infrastructure and services that are needed for people of all ages.

Answer the 50+ [Cycling Survey](#). The questionnaire takes about 10 minutes to complete.

The **Farm to Plate Network**, managed by the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF), just launched a [public survey](#) that will help develop a new vision for farming and food, and prioritize how we support and develop food and agriculture in the next decade. Your input is needed in order to update the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan (Vermont’s legislatively enabled statewide food system plan) and determine how the Farm to Plate Network supports and develops food and agriculture in the decade to come. [Click](#) to complete the survey.



Wifi Hotspot Program: The Vermont Department of Public Service is contracting for the rapid installation of commercial-grade outdoor Wireless Access Points at 50 sites around the state of Vermont that are accessible by vehicle in order to facilitate the emergency provision of adequate wireless internet and Wi-Fi calling services for telehealth, contact tracing, distance learning, e-government, remote working, and other COVID-19-related needs. These access points have been installed in Landgrove, Peru, North Bennington, Sunderland, and Sandgate. Contact Rob Fish, Rural Broadband Technical Assistance Specialist with the Vermont Department of Public Service (robert.fish@vermont.gov) for information about this opportunity.


Municipal Planning Grants: With continued funding support in the pending budget, the next round of Municipal Planning Grant applications will be due October 1st. State funding priorities for this year include COVID-19 economic recovery plans, fair and affordable housing plans, land use regulations that implement [Zoning for Great Neighborhoods](#), planning for a new state-designated area, and physical master planning for a state-designated area. For more information, see the FY21 [MPG Program Description](#) or contact [Cat Bryars](#) at the BCRC.

Planning and Zoning Essentials Training Materials Available: BCRC staff recently conducted a zoom-based workshop on planning and implementing land use regulations. The workshop presentation is available at the BCRC’s website: [Essentials Workshop](#) .

BCRC Meeting: July 16—via ZOOM. See front page for details.




2020 VIRTUAL VERMONT EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CONFERENCE



Join us for the Annual Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference - Virtually!

From the comfort of your own computer, tablet or phone - Learn, share and discuss the most relevant Emergency Management Topics of today!



2 Days September 29 & 30, 2020

Enjoy 8 Sessions - 1:00-5:00pm Each Day

Schedule of Speakers to be announced later this summer.

Registration and call for speakers will be posted on the VEM website soon!

