



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

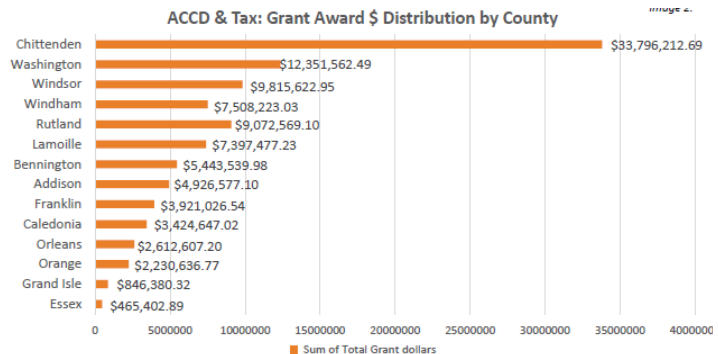
September 2020

Vermont Economic Recovery Grants Awarded to Area Businesses

The Department of Taxes launched the Emergency Grant Program for businesses who remitted sales and use, and rooms and meals tax on July 6. The same day, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development launched an Emergency Grant Program for all other eligible businesses pursuant to Act 115 and Act 137. BCRC's economic development staff worked to ensure that local

businesses were able to access the grant opportunities whenever possible. As a result, over five million dollars have been awarded to local businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The BCRC continues to work with businesses in all sectors to support recovery efforts. Contact [Bill Colvin](#) or [Jonathan Cooper](#) at the BCRC for more information.



September Meeting and Staff Notes

The September meeting of the BCRC will, once again, be held via ZOOM. Please contact Jim Sullivan (email below) for login/call-in information. The meeting will take place at 5:30 PM on Thursday, September 17. In addition to a vote on amendments to the BCRC Bylaws, staff will provide brief project updates and be available to answer questions. We are looking forward to the November meeting where we will have presentations on new regulatory initiatives to support housing development as well as an overview of the state's Village Wastewater Solutions Initiative.

The BCRC is welcoming a new VISTA this month! Callie Fishburn will be coming to us from Maryland, although she has family in the area and has visited many times. Callie will be working with the Southern Vermont CUD to support extension of broadband to rural areas in the region and with our many partners working on food security issues in Bennington. She'll also be lending a hand to support BCRC's COVID-19 relief efforts for local business.

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

Callie Fishburn, VISTA: cfishburn@bcrcvt.org

Vermont Rail Plan Update

The State of Vermont owns 305 of the approximately 578 miles of active rail line in the state. Passenger service is provided by Amtrak, consisting of the Ethan Allen Express terminating in Rutland (being extended to Burlington) and the Vermonter terminating in St. Albans. Freight services covering most of the rail network is provided by Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. and Vermont Rail System (VRS).

Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan sets forth goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions over the coming decades. Transportation strategies to achieve these goals include increasing intercity passenger ridership as well as moving more freight by rail rather than highways.

The Vermont Rail Advisory Council (VRAC) will serve as the primary sounding board for the [Rail Plan](#) update that will proceed through these steps:



For more information, contact the VTrans project coordinator: zoe.neaderland@vermont.gov.

Telecommuting Survey Results Released

The Center for Research on Vermont recently surveyed 662 Vermonters on their attitudes toward telecommuting and working from home. The survey attempted to capture Vermonter's impressions of telecommuting in the midst of the pandemic – the crisis presenting an enormous controlled experiment in Vermonters' experiences and perception of working from home. At the time of the survey, Google mobility reported a 42 percent drop in workplace travel and a 58 percent decline in retail shopping. Survey respondents overwhelming support telework, and strongly support being able to continue to work from home in the future.

Clearly, this population may have been more inclined to telework and their experience at this moment has only further emphasized their interest in doing so. More than half (55%) said they expect to work more from home after things return to something more like normal. And large pluralities said their workplace (70%) and internet service (86%) was good to excellent – enabling them to do so.

The biggest challenge identified by most respondents was the lack of workplace policies and support to allow them to telecommute more in the future. More than two-thirds said there was more their employers could do to enable them to work from home more often. The clearest recommendation that emerges is that there should be support and resources for small and large employers developing telework policies and programs. The full report can be read at: [Telecommuting Study](#).



Village Center Tax Credits Benefit Area Redevelopment Efforts

Governor Phil Scott recently announced [the recipients of \\$3.2 million in Downtown and Village Center tax credits](#) to support 30 projects in 27 Vermont communities. “I’m proud to see Vermont’s continued commitment to investing in their downtowns during these uncertain times - it is a testament to our sense of community and entrepreneurship, and I’m pleased the state can support this work through this program,” said Governor Scott. “As we continue to weather the devastating economic impacts of this global pandemic and rebuild our economy, the downtown and village center tax credits will help local communities put themselves in the best position to thrive into the future.”

The tax credits will support over \$160 million in downtown, village center and rehabilitation projects. In our region, two awards, totaling nearly \$150,000 will support elements of the Putnam Block development in downtown Bennington, over \$80,000 will go toward rehabilitation of the former Mark Skinner Library in Manchester Village to allow it to be transformed to a new restaurant, and approximately \$100,000 will help The Rupert Village Trust rehabilitate the historic Sheldon Store, providing the community with a café and community center.

“The pandemic has required everyone to step back and rethink what they do,” said Housing and Community Development Commissioner Josh Hanford. “It’s extremely inspiring for me to see that Main Street building owners have decided there has never been a better time to make the place they call home even better for their residents, businesses and visitors.”



The former public library in Manchester Village will be the new home of the Silver Fork Restaurant with support from a village center tax credit.

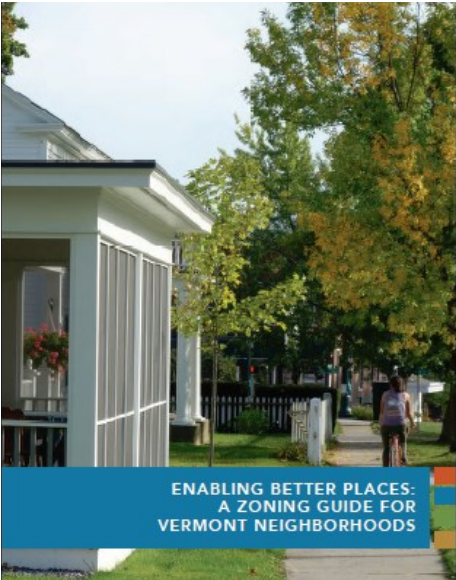
Emerging Leaders of Southern Vermont Class of 2020 Recognized

Thirty-one young professionals are being recognized as Emerging Leaders of Southern Vermont by the Southern Vermont Young Professionals and the Shires Young Professionals. This recognition celebrates young people from the Bennington and Windham Regions, based on their work as community leaders and volunteers, and for their professional accomplishments and commitment to serving the region. The Emerging Leader recognition was created to increase visibility and support for young leaders in the region, and to increase statewide recognition of southern Vermont’s young leaders. Nominations come from friends, colleagues, and fellow volunteers. Recognized from our region were:

- ◆ Aaron Dickie | Vermont Department of Labor | Bennington, VT
- ◆ Alex Figueroa | Southwestern Vermont Medical Center | Bennington, VT
- ◆ Austin Bevin | Brunswick Dental Associates | North Bennington, VT
- ◆ Hannah Cofiell | Butter Mountain Bakery | Woodford, VT
- ◆ Jared Newell | CDM Smith and Bennington Area Trail System | Old Bennington, VT
- ◆ Jenifer Prouty Hoffman | Hoffman Real Estate | North Bennington, VT
- ◆ Jennie Rozycki | John G. McCullough Free Library | North Bennington, VT
- ◆ Lauren Wilcox | Project Against Violent Encounters | Manchester, VT
- ◆ Sarah Perrin | Green Mountain Concessions and Bennington Select Board | Bennington, VT

For more information, see: [2020 Emerging Leaders](#).

Guide Presents New Zoning Principles for Neighborhood Development



The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the [Congress of the New Urbanism](#) (CNU) is pleased announce the completion of [Enabling Better Places: A Zoning Guide for Vermont Neighborhoods](#). This how-to manual promotes practical, small steps that Vermont's cities, towns and villages can take to address widespread regulatory barriers that limit the choice of conveniently located homes available at prices Vermont's people can afford.

The guide culminates a year of work with six Vermont communities through the [Project for Code Reform](#), CNU's strategic initiative to support cities and towns as they reform outdated zoning codes in favor of more walkable urbanism. With financial support from the [Vermont Housing & Conservation Board](#), [AARP-Vermont](#), and the [Vermont Association of Realtors](#), CNU worked with DHCD and Vermont's [Regional Planning Commissions](#) to create the new guide, focusing on increasing housing access and affordability in walkable centers.

The guide emphasizes incremental changes that can have a big impact in a single neighborhood or area of town, making it easy for communities to create solutions right for their needs and circumstances. This focus helps local leaders test approaches, build political will, and gain community support as they go, before moving on to other reforms.

During this time of uncertainty and intense separation, the need for communities to come together to find new ways to adapt and become and resilient becomes even more important. We hope communities large and small can use the guide to expand access and inclusion in housing, increase vitality and transform into even better places for their residents, businesses, and visitors.

The BCRC has been working on two projects that reflect many of the ideas presented in this new guide: a set of form-based design standards for neighborhoods within Bennington's Growth Center and a review, with recommendations, of the residential standards for all mixed-use town and village center municipal zoning districts in the region. Workshops focusing on these projects will be presented in the coming months; for more information, contact [Catherine Bryars](#) at the BCRC.

Message from Laura Walker, Bennington College's new President

Click to hear a message from the new President of Bennington College:



BENNINGTON COLLEGE
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Support Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Your Town or Village

The Local Solutions and Community Action Team of the Vermont Governor's Economic Mitigation and Recovery Task Force created a guide for municipalities and local leaders who are looking to expand the vibrancy of their communities. The Guide is intended to promote a welcoming and inclusive spirit in their communities. You can download the guide at:

[Municipal Guide for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#).

New Residential and Commercial Building Energy Standards

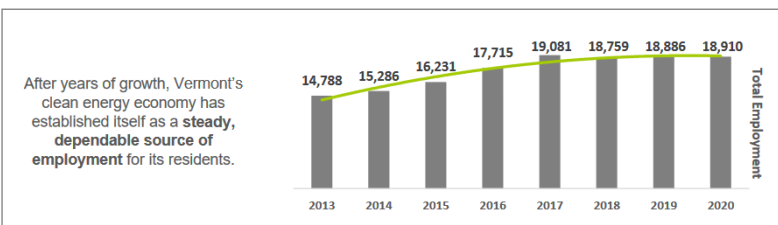
Free hard copies of the updated **2020 Vermont Commercial Building Energy Standards (CBES)** Codebook are available. Contact the Energy Code Assistance Center on 1-855-887-0673 or e-mail ecacemail@veic.org for copies. **The 2020 CBES is effective September 1, 2020.** Electronic copies of the commercial code are also available for purchase through the [International Code Council \(ICC\) website](#).

The [Public Service Department's CBES website](#) contains a series of training videos which contain details of the major changes, by section, implemented in the 2020 CBES. Efficiency Vermont also has pre-recorded on-line training available on their [website](#) dealing with the code update, including specific trainings focusing on items such as HVAC.

A draft of the **2020 Residential Handbook** is available on-line ([direct link](#)) or by selecting the link from the [Residential Building Energy Standards](#) webpage on the Public Service Department's website. Any changes to this draft will be non-substantive in nature. The official handbook will be uploaded as soon as it is finalized and formatted. Hard copies of this handbook will also be made available soon after the electronic version is made available. The hardcopies will be able to be requested by contacting the Energy Code Assistance Center on 1-855-887-0673 or e-mail ecacemail@veic.org. The [Department's RBES website](#) contains videos which contain details of the major changes implemented in the 2020 RBES. **The 2020 RBES is effective September 1, 2020.**

Efficiency Vermont has pre-recorded on-line training available on their [website](#) dealing with the code update, including specific trainings focusing on items such as the existing homes chapter. Contact Bryn Oakleaf, Program Manager/Energy Code Coordinator at Efficiency Vermont boakleaf@efficiencyvermont.com for more information.

Vermont Clean Energy Industry Report

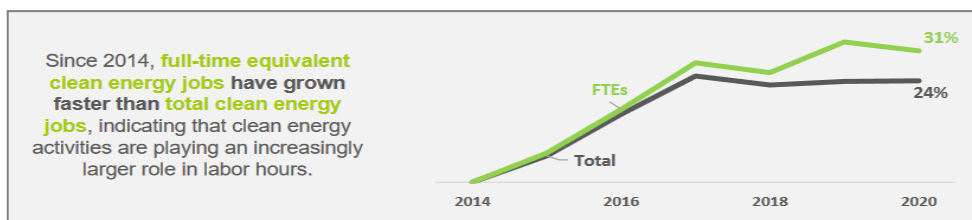


The Vermont Public Service Department (PSD) released the **2020 Vermont Clean Energy Industry Report**, the seventh annual report describing the status and characteristics of Vermont's clean energy industry. With pre-COVID total

employment of over 18,900 workers, the clean energy sector is a significant part of the Vermont economy, representing about 6% of all workers. The report shows that the number of clean energy jobs grew by 0.1% between the 2019 and 2020 reporting periods.

Commenting on the report Commissioner June Tierney said, "Although the data for the report were obtained prior to the COVID-19 economic disruptions, the insights and trends gleaned from the report can assist in the policy decisions the State makes as it works toward the Comprehensive Energy Plan's goals, strives to bring back lost jobs, and helps to revitalize the clean energy industry."

The full report can be found on the PSD's web site at: [2020 VT Clean Energy Industry Report](#).





Button Up 2020 Goes Virtual

This year upended life for just about all of us. With all the uncertainty we face, why add weatherization to your list of things to make happen in 2020? Well, it's even more important now that we're all spending more time at home.

- **Safety:** A professional weatherization contractor will help you ensure the right amount of fresh air is moving through your home to keep you healthy, without losing all that cold or heat you're paying for. This work can reduce mold and respiratory illness, keeping your family safer.
- **Money:** Winter used to be the only season we needed to spend money on to stay comfortable. But more of us are installing AC to make it through the longer heat waves we're facing. Anytime you're spending money to heat or cool your home (or time at the wood pile), weatherization is a great investment. The average Vermonter saves \$500 a year and stops those annoying drafts, which might be worth doing if date night is always at home for the foreseeable future.
- **Security:** Cheaper utility bills are always nice...but they're suddenly critical when you lose a job, as so many Vermonters did this year. Weatherization gives Vermonters financial flexibility, which can mean a lot during a crisis. And it's also a key step in preventing future crises. We can't meet our state climate goals without significant weatherization projects in almost all of our buildings. Progress here is necessary to reduce the future weather, economic, and yes, pandemic disasters that a warmer climate could bring.

For Button Up 2020, expert advice will be offered through online events, virtual home energy visits, and resources on the website. Efficiency Vermont is going a step further to help you help your neighbor. Efficiency Vermont has partnered with the Vermont Community Foundation to build the Button Up Vermont Fund, paying for weatherization projects for low income Vermonters. It's an opportunity to help your neighbors and double your impact with matching contributions from Button Up sponsors.

This year's campaign will last from mid-September to mid-November 2020. Contact your local energy committee or [Allison Strohl](#) at the BCRC for more information.



Forest Service * Somerset Integrated Resource Project

The USDA Forest Service has completed the Somerset Integrated Resource Project Environmental Assessment and DRAFT Decision Notice. First introduced to the public in May 2018, there have been multiple public meetings, field trips and two separate formal opportunities to provide comments for the project proposal. Objections may be submitted to the Forest Service during a 45-day objection period ending on October 2, 2020. A final Decision is expected later this fall.

The 71,000 acre project area is located near Somerset Reservoir on the Manchester Ranger District, Green Mountain National Forest within multiple towns and counties in southern Vermont. The Somerset project consists of multiple resource management activities on National Forest System lands designed to meet desired conditions provided by the Green Mountain National Forest Land & Resource Management Plan.

The Somerset project environmental assessment, draft decision notice, project maps, comment letters, and the consideration of comments report are available for review on the GMNF website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53706>. Hard copy versions of the documents are available for review during business hours at the Manchester Ranger Station. For more information, contact Jay Strand, Forest Planner and Environmental Coordinator: jay.strand@usda.gov.

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](#)



ACT Community Survey: complete a survey to help the Alliance for Community Transformations learn about community member perceptions around youth substance use in Bennington.

<https://bit.ly/3f8nopB> <https://www.facebook.com/ACTbennington/>

VCDA Conference—What’s Next for Vermont? Building Strong Communities in the “New Normal”

Virtual Event: September 1, 2020 | 1:00-3:30 p.m. Virtual conference and workshop on the critical recovery challenges and opportunities facing Vermont as our communities continue to grapple with the pandemic. What are the most significant impacts of Covid-19 on our economy and communities? What are the potential needs for future recovery, resilience, and renewal? Hear from a wide array of experts and practitioners in economics, housing, state & local government, and small businesses, and join together with peers from across the state to discuss the path forward. View the full [Agenda](#) and [Register](#) today!

Bennington College—CAPA Online: Offering [14 new classes](#) on topics such as regenerative food and agriculture, public health, plastic pollution, social justice, and more. [Registration is open!](#) These classes are open to learners at every stage—from high school seniors to retired professionals. Some classes have limited enrollment, but many are open to large numbers of participants. We believe that every one of these classes will share important knowledge for moving into the future, wherever we live and wherever we are in life at this moment. You may be in class with local citizens, people from across the country, or from regions all over the world. You may be in class with high school students as well as professionals at the height of their careers.

Household Hazardous Waste Event: The Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance will hold a household hazardous waste event on September 12, 2020, at the Dorset School 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.

Building Communities Grants Program: Administered by the Department of Buildings and General Services, includes: 1. the Recreational Facilities Grant Program, 2. the Regional Economic Development Grant Program, and 3. the Human Services and Educational Facilities Grant Programs. The grants are for construction and capital improvements to support and strengthen Vermont towns and regions. Descriptions and application criteria for all three of these grant programs are available on the Department of Buildings and General Services website:

<http://www.bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.

Applicants including municipalities, nonprofit agencies, and regional economic development organizations, are all encouraged to apply for these opportunities to fund construction, infrastructure support, and needed projects. The deadline to submit applications for the Building Communities Grants is Tuesday, September 15, 2020.

Trolley Line Path Alternatives Presentation: [September 16 at 5:30pm \(virtual meeting\)](#)

BCRC staff and a citizen steering committee for the Trolley Line Scoping Study have developed path route alternatives for public presentation and comment. The Trolley Line Path Project is a proposal for a multi-use path to be developed along the historic Berkshire Hills trolley car bed as it runs through the village centers of Bennington, Pownal Center, Pownal, and Williamstown, MA. A scoping study for this proposal is being completed by the BCRC, and the final study will be published by the end of 2020. The Alternatives Presentation will be hosted by BCRC over zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88400909730>

Questions may be directed to BCRC staff Cat Bryars, cbryars@bcrcvt.org.

Home Weatherization Incentives! For a limited time only, Efficiency Vermont is offering their highest-ever incentives for home weatherization. Most Vermonters can get up to 75% off project costs (up to \$5,500), no interest financing for 60 months, and six months of payments paid for by Efficiency Vermont. This offer is available on a first-come-first-served basis, so contact an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor as soon as possible. For more information, go to: [Home Weatherization Incentive](#)

BCRC September Meeting: Virtual Meeting at 5:30 PM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81317694327> * [1 929 205 6099](tel:19292056099) Meeting ID: 813 1769 4327

Vermont Diesel Emissions Reduction Grants: Please contact Maria Davies at (802) 622-4022 or at maria.davies@vermont.gov with any questions. View the Request for Proposals and application forms on the [Vermont Business Assistance Network](#) website. Applications are due September 18, 2020. A meeting by conference call will be held September 2, 2020 to go over the application process and answer questions.

2020 VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program: The intent of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Program is to improve access and safety for bicyclists and/or pedestrians through the planning, design and construction of infrastructure projects. For a copy of the VTrans 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program Guide and to access the application materials, visit the VTrans Bike/Ped Program website:

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/bike-ped>. Applications due September 30, 2020.

Municipal Planning Grants: Vermont's communities face tough challenges responding to and recovering from COVID-19, and the State's flexible [Municipal Planning Grants](#) are ready to support projects for long-term recovery. Now is a great time to consider proposals that boost resilience in your community. [Municipal Planning Grants](#) have helped communities just like yours implement town plan recommendations and jump start initiatives like zoning updates to welcome new homes, plans for a state designated area, or economic recovery strategies. A quarter of the funding has been approved to date, and a total of approximately \$450,000 will be awarded to municipalities to promote planning, revitalization, and development activities if the legislature level funds.

Towns may apply for up to \$22,000 and joint applications from several municipalities (a consortium) may apply for up to \$35,000. A wide range of municipal planning and implementation activities are eligible for funding. Please review the [Program Description](#) for eligibility requirements and use the new [Application Guide](#) and the criteria for successful applications. Applications are due October 1, 2020.

Energy Action Network Annual Summit: [Registration is now open](#) for the Energy Action Network's Annual Summit taking place October 1 and 2, 2020. The Summit will be held virtually over two partial-day sessions. The event is an opportunity to strengthen relationships, recognize progress, and identify

key action for the year ahead. As in previous years, the Summit will feature the presentation of pitches to rapidly, cost-effectively, and equitably reduce fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas pollution.

EAN is using a virtual platform called Hopin to host the Summit. In the lead up to the event, EAN staff will share instructions, videos, and host several brief trainings sessions to help orient attendees to the virtual platform. Don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions. You can find more information at <https://www.eanvt.org/events-and-initiatives/2020-summit/>.

Draft Form-Based Standards for Bennington LUDR published for Stakeholder Comment

The Bennington Planning Commission, with consultant support from BCRC staff, have developed draft form-based standards for the town center to be integrated into the municipal development regulations. Form-based standards emphasize form regulation over use regulation to develop walkable, safe, and economically resilient built environments. A pre-recorded presentation available at:

bcrvt.org/benningtonludr

walks viewers through the draft regulations. The full draft standards are posted at that URL for in-depth review. Stakeholders will be able to provide comment on the proposed standards through upcoming stakeholder sessions organized by the Bennington Planning Commission. For more information, contact Dan Monks, Bennington Planning Director. dmonks@benningtonvt.org. 802-447-9708.



Graphic from the draft Bennington Form-Based Design Standards