



Bennington County Regional Commission

News and Notes

January 2019

BCRC January Meeting

Thursday, January 17, 2019 - 5:30 PM

Brown Cow Café * 139 Main Street, Bennington

Open Discussion - Plan Implementation Priorities

The January meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission will be held on January 17, beginning at 5:30 PM, at the Brown Cow Café in Bennington. Appropriately, we'll begin 2019 by discussing priorities for implementing local and regional plans. We all have spent a great deal of effort, at both the local and regional levels, developing and adopting plans over the years. With state law now providing additional time between required plan updates, more attention can be focused on implementation of those plans. To get everyone thinking in advance of the meeting, we developed this short [survey](#) so we can better frame the discussion (click on this link to get to the survey):

[PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY](#)

The meeting also will include a review the BCRC's organization, staffing, and program areas to provide a context for how the BCRC might work on various projects in the future. We welcome you to complete the survey by January 10, 2019, and if you have any questions or difficulty in accessing the survey, contact Michael Batchner at the BCRC (mbatchner@bcrct.org) or (802) 442-0713 ext. 2).

The Commission also will vote on proposed amendments to the BCRC Bylaws that were distributed in November. Those amendments focus primarily on the integration of the regional development corporation (RDC) function within the BCRC. The RDC (known as the Bennington County Industrial Corporation or BCIC) has for the past several years contracted with the BCRC to provide staffing and to implement its work program. The officers of the BCRC and the BCIC have met and discussed how to most effectively continue and expand this cooperative work into the future. Both boards determined that fully integrating the RDC within the BCRC will result in efficiencies and help to ensure that planning and economic development efforts work synergistically for the benefit of our communities.

The bylaw amendment formalizes that relationship by establishing a new community and economic development committee within the BCRC organizational structure; that committee will be composed of members of the RDC and will be responsible for appointing five commissioners to serve on the BCRC, two of whom will be designated as members of the BCRC executive committee. The amendments also clarify the role of the BCRC executive committee in overseeing regulatory and legal matters and clarify quorum requirements. If you have any questions about these amendments or the related reorganization, please contact Jim Sullivan at the BCRC (jsullivan@bcrct.org) or 802-442-0713 ext 5).

Planning Grants Awarded to Three Area Towns

Municipal Planning Grants support local planning and community revitalization initiatives that build strong communities and improve Vermont's quality of life. Grants are awarded annually and administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development. Since 1998, the program has provided over \$12 million to 234 cities and towns. This year, approximately \$460,000 was awarded to 29 municipalities, including three towns in our region:

- **Bennington – Land Use Regulations for Neighborhoods:** Well-crafted, clearly illustrated, form-based land use regulations will help Bennington achieve its revitalization goals for the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. For more information, contact Daniel Monks, dmonks@benningtonvt.org. **Total Project Cost:** \$19,030 **Grant Funds Awarded:** \$17,300
- **Manchester – Market Analysis for Downtown Housing :** Manchester will conduct a detailed market analysis to increase housing options through mixed-use development in the downtown. For more information, contact Janet Hurley, j.hurley@manchester-vt.gov. **Total Project Cost:** \$12,000 **Grant Funds Awarded:** \$10,800
- **Pownal – Updating Zoning and Subdivision Regulations:** Pownal will overhaul its zoning and subdivision regulations to better support economic development in keeping with the new town plan. For more information, contact Nelson Brownell, brownn@rpi.edu. **Total Project Cost:** \$11,720 **Grant Funds Awarded:** \$10,548

Trolley Line Trail Scoping Study

In the early 20th Century, the Berkshire Hills Trolley Line connected a string of communities nestled in the narrow valley between the Green Mountains and Taconic Mountains, operating regular service between Bennington, VT; Pownal, VT; Williamstown, MA; and North Adams, MA. This past fall, BCRC was awarded a VTrans Bicycle/Pedestrian grant to study the feasibility of reusing portions of the abandoned trolley bed to create a 12-mile bicycle/pedestrian path to connect downtown Bennington to Williamstown, where it would connect with the planned Mohawk-Bicycle/Pedestrian Path to North Adams, which will eventually connect to the popular Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. If fully realized, this vision would create a 33-mile bicycle/pedestrian path stretching from Bennington to Pittsfield, MA.

The Trolley Line Trail could also serve as a segment of the Western New England Greenway, a multi-state effort to create a greenway that links New York City and Montreal. That greenway corridor

largely follows near US Route 7 through the very western portions of CT, MA, and VT and links with the East Coast Greenway and Quebec's Route Verte." <http://wnegreenway.org/>. For more information, contact Mark Anders (manders@bcrcvt.org) or Catherine Bryars (cbryars@bcrcvt.org) at the BCRC.



A section of the abandoned trolley line in Pownal. US Route 7 can be seen to the left.

Better Roads Manual Update Now Available

Over the course of the summer and fall a great deal of effort was made by VTrans staff to evaluate this manual, which hadn't been updated since 2009, and bring it into alignment with the recently issued Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP).

The purpose of the manual is to provide guidance to Vermont municipalities and road maintenance decision makers on cost effective techniques and actions that can be used to enhance the resilience of municipal roads while protecting water quality in Vermont. It will assist municipalities with implementation of appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) required by the ANR Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP). These BMPs are highlighted in the appropriate sections of the manual to inform municipalities of their permit obligations under the MRGP.

The manual can be obtained at: <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/better-roads>.



TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

CO2 Emissions per passenger mile¹²



Energy Action Network | eanvt.org



Transportation and Climate Change

The Energy Action Network (EAN) provides regular updates on Vermont's progress toward meeting its energy goals, and information on how we can support those efforts. One of our biggest challenges is the way our transportation system currently operates. Living in Vermont, we spend a lot of time getting from Point A to Point B. How we do that matters. The worst choice, from an emissions standpoint, is driving alone in a fossil fueled car. At the other end of the spectrum is making that trip in an electric vehicle (particularly when it's powered by our increasingly renewable electric supply). Best of all? Take a bike! This graphic summarizes greenhouse gas emissions by transportation choice.

For more information on Vermont's energy and climate goals, you can visit the EAN website at:

<http://eanvt.org/>.

Spring Flooding Seminar

Vermont Emergency Management will be holding a workshop in Manchester to inform local officials about ice jams and conditions that may result in spring flooding, and proactive measures to prepare for, respond to, and recover from such events. Topics covered will include the watch officer program, swift water and flood response, state capabilities, VT Alert notifications, and damage report collection. State recovery efforts also will be discussed and will include information about the public assistance and hazard mitigation grant programs, assistance process, thresholds for public assistance, damage documentation, agency roles, other funding sources. Also covered: the Division of Fire Safety post-disaster building inspections and the spring weather outlook from the National Weather Service.

The seminar will be held Thursday, February 21, from 10am-12pm at the Recreation Center, located off Route 30. For more information, please contact Allison Strohl at alangsdaile@bcrcvt.org.

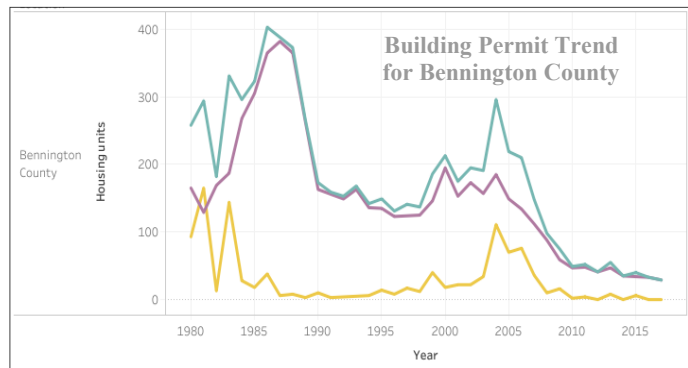
Redesigned Housing Website Unveiled

The Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) recently announced the launch of a robust, free resource connecting Vermonters to information about housing vacancies and community needs. Low and moderate income Vermonters who lack adequate, stable, and affordable housing suffer elevated health and safety risks. This [Vermont Housing Data website](http://www.housingdata.org) seeks to increase the number of stably housed Vermonters through state of the art information sharing tools.

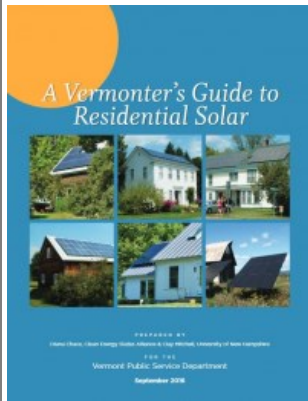
In addition to an apartment locator, the site's "community profiles" for every Vermont town and county help planners and decision makers more clearly assess population-level indicators and identify outcomes to address the most pressing housing needs. The profiles display data and vetted community housing needs indicators based on a variety of national and Vermont-based sources. The interactive and intuitive visualizations provide expanded filtering options and offer a wider range of information than ever before. This data is used by many different stakeholders, including municipal and regional planners, nonprofits, government agencies, and legislators. The standardized data and indicators included in the profiles are intended to improve the accuracy of local housing needs analyses to maximize the impact of public resources.

The fully revamped website is the result of years of planning and support from area stakeholders, including the Vermont Community Development Program, the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, AARP-Vermont, the TD Foundation, and Champlain Valley's Office of Economic Opportunity Thriving Communities initiative.

The community profiles can be found at: <http://www.housingdata.org/profile/>.



Guide to Residential Solar



There are many ways to build and finance a solar PV system.

[“A Vermonter's Guide to Residential Solar”](#) can help residents decide whether it makes sense for them to go solar and if so, how. The guide includes relevant information needed at different points during the decision making and installation process:

- Reasons Vermonters are choosing solar
- The physical components of a PV system
- Consumer needs, opportunities, and system design considerations
- Ways to finance a solar system
- Solar savings and incentives, including the federal tax credit, net metering, and Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs)
- Choosing a solar contractor and reviewing a solar contract
- Solar system permitting and after a system is installed

Appendices cover questions to ask a solar contractor, a project checklist, a glossary, and other resources. The guidebook was produced by the Clean Energy States Alliance and the Vermont Public Service Department and updated in the fall of 2018 to reflect changes in Vermont's net metering rules .

Climate Change in Vermont¹

Climate change is not something that will happen in the future. The Vermont climate is changing now! Our water supply, food supply, personal health and the resilience of our infrastructure depend on a stable climate. Changes include:



Recorded Changes in Temperature: Average temperatures in Vermont have risen 2.7⁰F since 1941 with increases of 1.6⁰F from 1960 to 2015 and 0.9⁰F from 1990 to 2015, which means warming is occurring more rapidly. Summer temperatures have increased 0.4⁰F per decade over the past 100 years while winter temperatures have increased 0.9⁰F per decade. Average temperatures have increased more in higher elevations than in low elevations.

Recorded Changes in Precipitation: The average annual precipitation in Vermont has increased 5.9" since 1960, with nearly half of this increase occurring since 1990. Higher elevations are receiving more of this increase than low elevations.

What Could Happen in the Future: Temperatures are projected to rise 3⁰F by 2050 and another 5⁰F by 2100 but could increase more depending on carbon dioxide emission levels. Precipitation is also projected to increase. The potential exists for extreme events including high temperatures with an increasing number of days above 90⁰F, extreme precipitation events leading to flooding, erosion, and drought.

Warming temperatures will reduce winter snowfall and cause more rapid melting of the snowpack in spring and possible higher spring flooding. Dormant season evapotranspiration is limited so more water will flow into streams, creating more flooding potential. Freezing rain may become more frequent, with resulting impacts to transportation and power systems.

The base flow of streams and rivers, which comes primarily from groundwater, may decrease with warmer summers. These changes will alter water availability, possibly alter groundwater availability, and require greater management of stormwater and resulting erosion.

What Can Towns Do:

- Town plans need to include flood resiliency sections. Those sections should include actions to protect floodplains, river corridors and wetlands that provide for flood storage and the shifting course of rivers. They also should include protecting forested lands that absorb and slow the flows from storm events.
- Hazard mitigation plan actions should address future climate, particularly with respect to infrastructure improvements.
- Many towns have completed stormwater master plans and all towns should complete these. These plans provide specific actions and infrastructure improvements to address erosion and sedimentation.
- Towns should address invasive species in their planning and budgeting. Emerald ash borer is in Bennington County and others will appear and become more abundant and destructive with warming temperatures.
- Towns need to identify populations that may be vulnerable to temperature extremes, especially high temperatures.

1. There are numerous reports on climate change available. Much of this comes from Galford, Gillian L., Ann Hoogenboom, Sam Carlson, Sarah Ford, Julie Nash, Elizabeth Palchak, Sarah Pears, Kristin Underwood, and Daniel V. Baker, Eds, 2014: *Considering Vermont's Future in a Changing Climate: The First Vermont Climate Assessment*. Gund Institute for Ecological Economics, 219 pp.

Hazard Mitigation Plans in Process and Approved

FEMA has approved the hazard mitigation plan for the Town of Glastenbury. The BCRC is currently working with both Arlington and Pownal on their hazard mitigation plans, and the Woodford Planning Commission is revising their plan. The Towns of Rupert and Sunderland have been granted approval for funding to revise their plans.

BCRC Staff Notes

BCRC's assistant director and community and economic development coordinator, **Bill Colvin**, was one of nine recipients of this year's VT Chamber of Commerce Above and Beyond Awards, given annually to individuals who have gone above and beyond in their job, industry, or community work thus contributing to a more vibrant state for Vermonters to live, work, and play. Congratulations to Bill on this well-deserved recognition! John Shanahan of the Bennington Downtown Alliance and Paul Carroccio, Manchester Business Alliance and TPW Real Estate, also were recognized for the honor.



The BCRC recently welcomed **Madison Kremer** who will be serving as a VISTA for the next year. Madison is a recent graduate of the Sustainable Community Development Program at the University of Massachusetts. At the BCRC Madison will be working on housing development and programs to advance community and economic development (including work at Shires Housing), downtown and village center revitalization, town energy committee support, and green infrastructure management.

Events and Opportunities....

2019 Southern Vermont Zone CEDS

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
for the Bennington and Windham Regions

Final Southern Vermont CEDS

Presentation:

Monday, January 7th 4-6 PM

Wilmington Town Offices, 181 VT Rt. 100

For more information, go to the project website: <https://www.sovermontsummit.com/2019-zone-ceds>



Regular Meeting of the BCRC

Thursday, January 17 5:30—7:30 PM

Brown Cow Café - 139 Main Street, Bennington

See page 1 article for details



The Vermont Council on Rural Development is inviting towns to apply for the 2019 **Climate Economy Model Communities Program**. This is a great opportunity to rally your community together to identify and implement strategies that improve your local economy while also tackling climate change. An overview of the program can be found [here](#) along with the RFP materials. Applications are due on January 18, 2019. E-mail or call Jon Copans with questions - jon@vtrural.org or (802) 225-6393.

Southwestern Vermont Regional Energy Forum

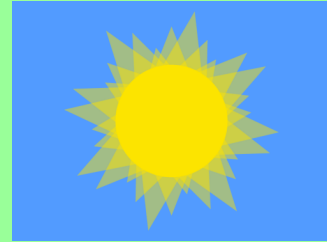
Thursday, January, 31, 2019 * 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Martha Canfield Library, Arlington, VT ([find it here](#))

Learn how you can help your community save energy and money by starting an energy committee! Hear success stories from existing energy committee members, discuss available resources, and talk with your neighbors about what you would like to do in your own communities.

Organized by the Bennington County Regional Commission in partnership with the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network and Efficiency Vermont. While [RSVP](#) is not required, we appreciate you letting us know if you can attend so that we can order food and plan space accordingly.

For questions, contact Madison at mkremer@bcrcvt.org or (802)442-0713 x9.



Better Buildings By Design Conference

February 6 & 7, 2019

DoubleTree by Hilton Burlington Hotel - South Burlington, Vermont

Better Buildings by Design is the region's premier design and construction conference, which features interactive learning about building durability, efficiency, and value for both residential and commercial projects. This annual not-for-profit conference sponsored by Efficiency Vermont brings together top talent in building technology and design from across the country, and helps keep Vermont-area professionals at the forefront of their fields.

Full conference, one day only, and student registration options are available. [Learn more and register to attend.](#)

Deerfield Wind Bear Study

February 11, 6:00 PM at the Woodford Town Hall

1391 VT Route 9—Woodford

Surrounding the Deerfield Wind Project are some of the largest concentrations of bear scarred beech left in Vermont. The Deerfield Wind Black Bear Study is designed to better understand impacts that large-scale wind development has on bear use of these important feeding sites. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department has been tracking radio collared bears in the Woodford area for a number of years now and along with learning about the impacts of the wind project we're also learning about how bears move across the landscape and interact with other types of human development. Jaclyn Comeau, the wildlife biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department who oversees the Deerfield Wind Black Bear Study, will discuss the study and preliminary findings.



Ice Jams and Spring Flooding—Workshop

Thursday, February 21, from 10am-12pm

Manchester Recreation Center—Recreation Park Road.

See article page 3. For more information, please contact Allison Strohl at alangsdaile@bcrcvt.org.



Grant applications for Downtown Transportation Fund Grants are due March 11, 2019.

See the [2019 Downtown Transportation Fund Grant Program Description](#) for eligibility, funding and application requirements. Any municipality with a Designated Downtown may apply for funding so long as they don't currently have two or more DTF grants open. The maximum grant amount is \$100,000 with an additional \$100,000 available for eligible storm water projects .

Grant funds may not exceed 50% of the overall project and a 50% match is required. Projects must demonstrate the ability to start the project within 18 months and complete within 30 months. Projects that have been identified, described, and well supported through a downtown area master plan-

ning process such as [Better Connections](#) or other planning process focused on the downtown, will receive an additional bonus points.

The Southern Vermont Microentrepreneur Loan has been established to provide financing for businesses, that are not able to obtain conventional financing, located in Windham and Bennington counties. Eligible uses include:

- Working capital;
- The purchase of furniture, fixtures, supplies, inventory or equipment;
- Debt refinancing;
- Business acquisitions; and
- The purchase or lease of real estate that is already improved and will be used for the location of the subject business only, provided no demolition or construction will be accomplished with program funding. Neither interior decorating, nor the affixing of chattel to walls, floors, or ceilings are considered.



This program is accompanied with a technical assistance grant that can help to prepare a business to access the program as well as accompany any distributed loan. These funds require a credit elsewhere check, so for projects that are not ready for traditional lending, this program can provide access to capital, as well as, the technical assistance to ensure they will be able to access traditional financing in the future. Contact R.T. Brown for an initial consultation: rbrown@brattleborodevelopment.com.

Form-Based Standards Workshop YouTube

The BCRC organized this presentation by Randall Arendt in October. CAT-TV recorded the event, which can be viewed here: [Form-Based Standards—Randall Arendt](#)