



Bennington County Regional Commission

Minutes

Thursday, September 19, 2024

5:30 PM

Pownal Town Office, Pownal, VT

Present: Cat Bryars, Sheila Kearns, Walt Klinger, John LaVecchia, Andrew McKeever, Dan Monks, Nick Zaiac

BCRC Staff: Bill Colvin, Jonathan Cooper, Callie Fishburn, Scott Grimm-Lyon, Jim Henderson, Janet Hurley, Samantha Page, Dara Zink

Janet Hurley called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1. Public hearing for amendment to Bennington Town Plan (Janet Hurley)

Nick Zaiac moved to open hearing, Dan Monks seconded the motion. The change in the Bennington Town Plan concerns two parcels going from Industrial to Village Residential. Bennington adopted the change at end of June and is seeking approval from the BCRC to approve the amendment and to retain its approved status. The property owner had tried to develop as industrial use, but now wants to develop as residential use. Zoning was changed coincident with the plan change.

Cat Bryars moved to close the hearing, John LaVecchia seconded, hearing is closed. Votes by Commissioners will be tallied and announced later in the meeting.

2. Minutes of July 18, 2024 (Janet Hurley)

Sheila Kearns moved to approve the minutes, Cat Bryars seconded. No discussion. Approved by voice vote.

3. Municipal Vulnerability Indicator Tool (Dara Zink, Callie Fishburn)

Emergency Management Program Manager Dara Zink presented on a new state-developed tool that is meant to help municipalities understand climate hazards and increase climate resilience. Dara provided a demo of the MVI tool with specific examples in different BCRC municipalities. Callie presented an introduction to the Community Profiles and potential actions derived from MVI Tool.

4. Municipal Energy Resilience Program Recap (Callie Fishburn)

Regional Planner Callie Fishburn presented on the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. 9 BCRC municipalities applied for and received mini-grants of \$4000 mini-grants, which have primarily been used for public events. 13 municipalities applied for building assessments, with a total of 27 buildings assessed—6 as Level 2 assessments and 21 as Level 1 assessments. The program is now

in the Implementation Grant phase. Municipalities can apply for up to \$500,000 each, with applications due September 27.

5. 2024 Regional Plan Update (Janet Hurley)

BCRC Assistant Director and Planning Program Manager gave an update on the Bennington Regional Plan. A draft of the updated plan is now available on the BCRC website. One major new element of this plan is the housing targets, which was a requirement of the 2023 HOME Act. Janet outlined the disaggregation methodology that BCRC developed and applied to data from DHCD and municipalities. The draft also includes new maps and an update to the energy plan with new data. The plan also features an implementation matrix to guide implementation of the plan. BCRC will hold two public hearings on the regional plan: one on Thursday, October 24, and one on Thursday, November 21.

6. Intermunicipal Service Agreements (Bill Colvin)

Director Bill Colvin presented on a proposed BCRC bylaw change that would enable intermunicipal service agreements. If approved, these intermunicipal service agreements would be completely voluntary for member municipalities to enter into. This would enable the BCRC to hire employees to serve a shared role between agreed-upon municipalities, for example. The process for this bylaw adoption is statutorily defined. The BCRC has notified its municipalities of this proposed bylaw change as defined in statute, and a public hearing will take place on October 24. This will be followed by a comment period until November 5, and then a commissioner vote on November 18. Approval would require an affirmative vote of 67% of BCRC municipalities.

7. Bill Colvin announced results for ballot on Bennington Town Plan amendment

There were 16 total ballots cast, including proxy ballots submitted in advance of the meeting, all affirmative. Twelve of the ballots were cast by municipal commissioners from 12 unique municipalities; 2 were cast by alternate commissioners from municipalities; and 2 were cast by special purpose commissioners. The process requires 9 municipalities to approve, so the change has been approved.

8. Southern Vermont CEDS Meetings (Jonathan Cooper)

Community and Economic Development Program Manager Jonathan Cooper presented on upcoming community engagement opportunities for the *Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*. There will be a series of events throughout Southern Vermont on September 25 and 26, and a virtual event on September 30.

9. Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study (Walt Klinger)

BCRC Commissioner from Pownal Walt Klinger presented on a MassDOT study on the possible extension of passenger rail service out to North Adams, MA. One study possibility includes continued service to Albany via Pownal. Public Comment is open on the study until October 12.

Respectfully submitted,



William Colvin

Director

DRAFT