



# MINUTES

Thursday – May 18, 2023

4:30 PM

Paresky Room, Bennington Museum

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Present: Jim Sullivan, John Laveccia Jr, Dimitri Garder, Walter Klinger, Sam Restino, Gay Squire, Liz Ruffa, Peter Samson, Jessica Hartleben, Brett Long, Jonah Spivak, Shelia Kearns, Rich Zoppel, Dana Rozycki, Adam Grinold, Jay Reichman, Dan Monks, Cinda Morse, Bill Fisk, Shannon Barsotti, Martin Mahoney, Bruce Lierman

BCRC Staff: Callie Fishburn, Bill Colvin, Amanda Stevens, Janet Hurley, Mark Anders, Scott Grimm-Lyon, Jim Henderson

1. Commissioners and guests arrived at 4:30 and enjoyed a cash bar and appetizers provided by Pangaea.
2. BCRC Executive Director Bill Colvin welcomed everyone to Manchester and then provided an overview of the BCRC's recent work. Those comments are included here:

*Welcome to the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission, the first in well over a decade without Jim Sullivan at the helm, though we are delighted that he is here this evening in his Director Emeritus capacity. I am not sure how many basketball fans we have in the room, but this is a picture of former NBA all-star Shaquille O'Neal's shoes from the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, MA. Mr. O'Neal's size 22s are purported to be the largest of any player in NBA history, a distinction wrested away from another former NBA great when it was found that despite similar size 22 claims Bob Lanier actually wore a mere size 18 ½. When it comes to RPC directors, at least metaphorically, Jim is like Shaquille O'Neal. Very large shoes to fill indeed.*

*We extend our sincere thanks to the Bennington Museum for hosting us in this wonderful venue and to Pangaea for the terrific food we enjoyed during the networking and social portion of the evening.*

*Back in 2020 we found a lot of our work effort shifting to focus specifically on pandemic response: providing technical assistance to municipalities who were also trying to adapt to new requirements and access funding as well as direct support to businesses that were trying to survive and adapt to new ways of doing things. We are continuing that work today by helping local governments work through various federal funding opportunities, new efforts to assist our most rural municipalities, continuing our recent efforts public health equity planning, helping to direct federal infrastructure spending, and other initiatives that grew out of the pandemic.*

*The work the BCRC engages with is vast, meaningful and ever-expanding but I will attempt briefly to hit a few highlights from each of our program areas:*

#### *Solid Waste Planning and Management*

*The BCRC provides organizational and staffing support for the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance. Our solid waste program is overseen by Scott Grimm-Lyon. Scott has been heavily focused on advancing the Alliance initiative to establish a new permanent hazardous waste collection facility and thanks to his efforts the building is being delivered and set up next week and should be up and running sometime in June. It has been a long and complicated process which Scott has marshalled masterfully. Scott and Paula Kamperman also continue their outreach on recycling and composting across the region, including the ever-popular compost bin sales.*

#### *Emergency Management*

*Until just last week, Allison Strohl was our emergency management program manager overseeing development of new local hazard mitigation plans while promoting inter-town coordination through the Regional Emergency Management Committee. Things really get busy when there is a major “event,” like the extreme rainstorm and flooding that hit Sandgate, Manchester and parts of several other towns last year. Jim Henderson has been invaluable in supporting the local response by doing field investigations and working with local officials, state coordinators, and FEMA to make sure municipalities receive support for repairing and remediating damage.*

*Allison and Jim also have worked with town officials and state river engineers to obtain Hazard Mitigation Grants to develop plans to limit future flood damage – most recently for projects along Bourn Brook and Lye Brook in Manchester. Allison will be missed as she relocates to the Midwest to be closer to family.*

#### *Transportation*

*The BCRC is continuing its longstanding work as the local planning liaison between municipalities and the Vermont Agency of Transportation, with Mark Anders keeping things moving (as it were) for all transportation modes. Mark always has been a strong advocate for bicycle and pedestrian*

*transportation and just last week exceeded the official ribbon cutting of the new Bennington Bike Path; a project decades in the making.*

*Other bike-ped projects in development include: a long-needed connection from Arlington's village center to the Rec Park, and exciting planning studies for a connection into Dorset of the new pathway that runs from the Manchester Rec Center to North Road, a new bike path connecting Manchester and Manchester Village and another that would really be a huge regional economic asset: a pathway following much of the old trolley line south from Bennington that could eventually connect through the Ashuwillticook Trail all the way to Pittsfield, Massachusetts.*

*And Mark also continues the daily work that includes such things as implementing highway and bridge project priorities, evaluating public transit services, and making sure our infrastructure is ready for the future.*

### *Comprehensive Municipal Planning*

*Late in 2022, BCRC's former director of planning, Cat Bryars, accepted an exciting new position as interim director of Shires Housing. We were very fortunate that Manchester Planning Director, Janet Hurley decided to join BCRC as assistant director and planning program manager. With Janet's deep background in planning and familiarity with the region the transition was smooth.*

*In addition to Janet, planning staff includes Callie Fishburn, who will be receiving an award as one of Southern Vermont's Emerging Leaders at next week's Southern Vermont Economy Summit and Samantha Page who is graduating this week from the Harvard Graduate School of Design with a Masters in Urban Planning. Samantha joined the BCRC part-time in January and will begin her full-time employment with us in the coming weeks. BCRC planning staff has invested a tremendous amount of effort into comprehensive plan updates, enhanced energy plans, and updating municipal land use regulations. In addition to recent comprehensive bylaw updates for several towns, the BCRC organized nine towns and villages to jointly apply for a "bylaw modernization" grant and is busy working with these towns to implement many of the recommended amendments identified in the recent *Regional Housing Bylaw Survey*.*

*Thanks to the hard work of local volunteers and our planning staff, we now have an extensive list of designated village centers, a neighborhood development area, a designated downtown, and a growth center throughout the region – with more in the works. These designations provide some real, and expanding, benefits for those communities and are likely to pay even larger benefits with the passage of the Vermont HOME act during the recently concluded session of the Vermont General Assembly.*

### *Community and Economic Development*

*The BCRC serves as the planning AND economic development agency for our region; one of only two combined regional planning commissions, regional development corporations in the State. With me*

*assuming the BCRC Director's role, Jonathan Cooper has stepped up to lead BCRC's Community & Economic Development Program. I continue to work in this program and Scott Grimm-Lyon has also been busy with projects in this arena including the Dorset Housing Study, the Bennington Armory Reuse Study and a commercial siting project in Pownal. In general, BCRC's Community & Economic Development Program supports economic vitality in the region through efforts focusing on workforce development, grant assistance for businesses, housing, downtown redevelopment, and providing staffing capacity to the Southern Vermont Communication Union District as it works to expand broadband access.*

*The BCRC continues to support brownfields redevelopment by identifying sites and providing pass-through funding for assessments of properties that hold significant economic potential, but which are held back due to questions about potential environmental contamination. Recent assessments are supporting successful redevelopment projects in Manchester, Arlington, and Bennington. Jim Henderson has done tremendous work in this area in the past year utilizing all the State assessment funding available to the BCRC and applying for a new federal assessment grant through the US Environmental Protections Agency.*

#### Public Health

*In a new line of programming commencing last year, the BCRC has been working with a diverse group of community partners on several key public health initiatives. Callie is working with the Vermont Department of Health, local organizations, and other regional planning commissions, to develop programs and implement projects that address disparities in health outcomes. You will hear more about that work later this evening.*

*Scott has been leading an effort, partnering with Greater Bennington Community Services and others, that focuses on the health needs of the region's homeless population including unaccompanied youth.*

#### Environmental Projects

*When not overseeing the BCRC's brownfields work, a lot of Jim Henderson's time is spent working with municipalities on water quality improvement initiatives. We've supported development of a tactical basin plan, stormwater master plans, and more – all of which provide tools for towns and villages to implement a range of water quality projects that have the collateral benefit of improving local roads.*

#### Energy Planning

*Callie Fishburn oversees the BCRC energy program after working closely with Jim Sullivan in this realm the past couple of years. In addition to general support for various regional energy committees and their efforts, Callie, Janet and Samantha are working on an enhanced energy plan for the Town of Shaftsbury and Callie has assumed a role as one of three regional planners statewide leading an effort to assist the*

*Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services in its roll out the new Municipal Energy Resilience Program.*

*Administration*

*And I would be completely remiss to not offer thanks on behalf of the entire staff to the person who keeps us all on track, somehow monitoring and reporting on over 60 different funding sources, while simultaneously juggling payroll, tax, financial reporting and HR responsibilities. Thank you to Amanda Stevens, BCRC Financial Manager, for everything you do to keep the rest of the staff sane and doing it with a smile and friendly nudge to “get those timesheets in”.*

*In Closing...*

*We’ll continue work in all these areas in the coming year and, if recent experience holds, a few new areas too. I feel fortunate every day to come to work with a staff of dedicated professionals committed to assisting regional municipalities and employers in taking advantage of new funding opportunities and navigating an ever more complex regulatory environment while working tirelessly to improve the communities in which we live. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.*

*And finally, a very special thank you to three long-serving, highly-engaged BCRC Commissioners who are retiring their roles. Thank you to Nancy Faesy, Cinda Morse and John Lavecchia Sr. for all the time, energy, knowledge and goodwill you have given to the BCRC. You will be missed!*

3. The 2022 BCRC Bongartz Award for Community Service was presented to Jim Sullivan of North Bennington. An engraved glass bowl from Simon Pearce was presented to Jim, pre-filled with treats for both Jim and his beloved dogs, Zaphod and Jackson. Colvin made the following remarks when presenting the award:

*The Bongartz Award for Community Service has been awarded by the BCRC, beginning in May 1997, to a person who has “demonstrated ideals, beliefs and excellence in community planning and service.” The award is named after one of the BCRC’s founding members, Ferdinand “Nundy” Bongartz of Manchester, who epitomized those principles in his work for the town, region, and state over many years.*

*This year’s recipient is well known to all attending this evening and far beyond. He dedicated over thirty years of his life to the BCRC and the communities the Commission serves. And while, when learning he would be the recipient of this year’s Bongartz Award, he requested little fanfare this evening, after a life committed to improving those of everyone in the region that just doesn’t feel right.*

*It will come as little surprise that the 2023 Bongartz Award is being presented to Jim Sullivan!*

*Jim began his career at the BCRC in 1989 and over the more than thirty-three years at the Commission he was committed to improving the lives of those living in Southwestern Vermont. Throughout his career Jim served with integrity, humility and a passion for the development of planning tools and policies that would result in stewardship of the natural environment and projects that led to growth in scale with the communities in the region. Jim did this without desire for recognition for all he contributed to the area's success for decades.*

*I first worked with Jim beginning in the late 1990's in my role as the Development Director for the Town of Bennington. BCRC was a critical partner in every community and economic development initiative the Town undertook, and, in each case, Jim Sullivan was the representative of BCRC helping the town forge a path toward success. BCRC's support involved the development of maps, grant application and management assistance, project and committee participation and the crafting and implementation of policies and procedures to encourage the type of development desired in the community, while maintaining consistency with state land use planning goals.*

*When he approached me in 2012 regarding the possibility of working with him to establish a community and economic development program at the BCRC, despite a lack of funding to support one, knowing what I knew of Jim, his talents, his tenacity and his commitment to the region, it was easy to say "Absolutely!"*

*Jim's knowledge and technical skills in the areas of land use, transportation and energy planning are unsurpassed. Jim became one of the foremost experts in energy policy in Vermont. Through his commitment to sound planning principals, which contribute to desirable and necessary development activities which balance human needs with protection of environmental assets, Jim Sullivan has served as an invaluable public servant to not only the Southwestern Vermont but to the entire state.*

*At his retirement party last fall, Jim concluded his remarks by reflecting on the enjoyment he derived from working with committed volunteers in every municipality in the region over the past three decades. The humbleness exhibited in a statement like that, shifting the spotlight to others and away from himself, is perfectly emblematic of Jim's career and personality; and it is one of the many things that make Jim an ideal recipient of this year's Ferdinand "Nundy" Bongartz Award.*

4. Election of Officers: The BCRC Nominating Committee met in April and proposed the following slate of officers:

Chair – Nick Zaiac (Arlington)

Vice-Chair – Dan Monks (Bennington)

Secretary – Shelia Kearns (Sandgate)

Treasurer – James Salerno (Shaftsbury)

Seventeen (17) ballots were received from BCRC Commissioners, and the above-noted slate was unanimously elected. Per BCRC Bylaws, each officer is elected for a three-year term.

5. The keynote address was provided by Dr. Jude Smith Rachele, Co-founder and CEO of Abundant Sun, a justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) training and consulting firm with offices in the UK, Europe

and the United States. Dr. Rachele described the arc of her career in the JEDI field and dispelled numerous misconceptions people often hold regarding diversity and inclusion.

6. BCRC Planner Callie Fishburn provided an overview of the work the BCRC has been doing in conjunction with the other ten regional planning commissions statewide to develop a municipal health equity planning toolkit. The toolkit can be found [here](#).
7. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:33 PM.