



## *Bennington County Regional Commission*

# MINUTES

Thursday – May 19, 2022

5:30 PM

Kilburn Meeting Room, Manchester Town Offices and via Zoom

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**Recording available at:**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/\\_ewo1Bw-cfDJU5ifkKhRC7yDRCefvdFDAN\\_oRhM83RjL7ArhZonAUFvIVHJq5TUH.AOuOPladMil774Bi](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/_ewo1Bw-cfDJU5ifkKhRC7yDRCefvdFDAN_oRhM83RjL7ArhZonAUFvIVHJq5TUH.AOuOPladMil774Bi)

Present: Anita Sheldon, Jim Hand, Dan Monks, Martha Cornwell, Robert Zeif, Walt Klinger, Janet Hurley, Mary Rogers, Anthony Maclaurin, Marc Johnston, Mike Nawrath, Rose Keough, DHCD Commissioner Josh Hanford, Brian Benson, John LaVecchia, John LaVecchia Sr, Curan VanDerWielen, Dixie Zens, Nancy Faesy, Gay Squire, Megan Herrington, Stephanie Lane, Bill Drunsic, Kelly Dickie, Jock Irons, Cinda Morse, Michael McDonough, Doug Kilburn, Cynthia Kilburn

BCRC Staff: Jim Sullivan, Callie Fishburn, Bill Colvin, Cat Bryars, Jonathan Cooper, Amanda Stevens, Mark Anders, Scott Grimm-Lyon, Jim Henderson

1. Commissioners and guests arrived at 5:30 and enjoyed a light meal provided by Zoey's Deli.
2. BCRC Executive Director Jim Sullivan welcomed everyone to Manchester and then provided an overview of the BCRC's recent work. Those comments are included here:

"Welcome to the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Bennington County Regional Commission, our first in-person annual meeting, or in-person meeting of most any kind, in over two years. We extend our sincere thanks to the Town of Manchester for hosting us in a venue that lets us take advantage of that most important outcome of the Covid-19 Pandemic: ZOOM meeting technology!

When the pandemic arrived in early 2020 we really didn't know what to expect or how it would affect the BCRC and its work. Looking back now, I can say that the BCRC adapted and responded quickly and effectively, and has actually grown in ways that we couldn't have anticipated. Somehow we managed to relocate our offices right at the beginning of the pandemic – we're now at 210 South Street in Bennington and actually looking to expand our office space to accommodate a growing staff. Speaking

of staff, hats off to everyone who managed to get up to speed so quickly with remote work and meetings – we really didn't miss a beat while overhauling a whole section of our personnel policies and procedures.

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 American Rescue Plan opportunities, starting new public health programs, helping to direct federal infrastructure spending, and other initiatives that grew out of the pandemic.

To catch everyone up with our work, here are some highlights from the past couple of years 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 and we experienced a transition recently with the retirement of Michael Batchter and the hiring of a new program manager, Scott Grimm-Lyon. Scott has stepped right in and taken control – just in time to organize and hold a successful household hazardous waste collection event (attended by nearly 300 households) while advancing the Alliance initiative to establish a new permanent hazardous waste collection facility. And, of course, Scott and Paula Kamperman continue their outreach on recycling and composting across the region: NEXT UP – COMPOST BIN SALES, GET YOUR ORDERS IN NOW!

#### Emergency Management

Allison Strohl is our emergency management program manager and has been busy 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 here in Manchester.

#### 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 won an award for his leadership in bringing the Orchard Village to Willowbrook pathway in Bennington to fruition.

Other bike-ped projects in development include: the Bennington Bikepath (finally!) along the southern section of the old rail spur from Bennington Station as well as a connection out to Silk Road and the soon-to-be built roundabout that will provide a safe crossing to Bennington College, 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, 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.

Of course, 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 (think EV charging stations, for example) continues...

### Comprehensive Municipal Planning

Cat Bryars is our Director of Planning and has put 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 that will implement many of the recommended amendments identified in the Regional Housing Bylaw Survey that we completed last year.

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 downtown, and a growth center throughout the region – with more in the works. These designations provide some real, and expanding, benefits for those communities. I'll make special note of the designation for Rupert Village that was important in securing grants to revitalize that area and underpin a planning process that was recognized as the Vermont and Northern New England planning project of the year last year.

### Community and Economic Development

As you know the BCRC serves as the planning AND economic development agency for our region and Bill Colvin and Jonathan Cooper, assisted by other BCRC staff – notably Callie Fishburn – have done a great job supporting economic vitality through efforts focusing on workforce development, grant assistance for businesses, housing, downtown redevelopment, and, working with the Southern Vermont Communication Union District, expanded broadband access.

The BCRC has been involved in some particularly interesting community and economic development projects over the past couple of years, including major reuse studies of the former Energizer manufacturing facility and the Southern Vermont College campus (recently acquired by Southwestern Vermont Health Care). We're also just getting ready to kick off an important housing study in Dorset and an assessment of potential business development sites in Pownal.

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.

### Public Health

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.

Scott has helped us kick off an effort, partnering with GBICS and others, that focuses on the health needs of the region's homeless population.

We've also supported the growth and diversification of the regional food systems through our VISTA service program – you can see results of everyone's hard work tomorrow and Saturday at the Bennington Food Summit.

And our work with The Collaborative resulted in another award to the BCRC, from the Vermont Prevention Partners program.

### 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, Cat, and I assist with the development of local energy plans, cooperated with the Vermont Public Service Department in development of the new state comprehensive energy plan and energy planning guidelines for towns and regions, and with the Vermont Climate Council on strategies to reduce energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions. Callie has been particularly helpful in supporting local energy committees with special projects like Window Dressers and assisting with energy grants, such as the EV charging grant recently received by Shires Housing.

We'll continue work in all of these areas in the coming year and, based on recent experience, a few new areas as well.

I want to conclude by saying thank you to all of the BCRC commissioners and staff, and local and state government officials, staff, and volunteers I've worked with over the years. It's been a wonderfully

rewarding career and when I retire at the end of this year it is good to know that the BCRC will be stronger than ever.”

3. The 2022 BCRC Bongartz Award for Community Service was presented to Rose Keough of Sunderland. An engraved cutting board from JK Adams was presented to Rose along with these remarks from the Commission:

*The Bongartz Award for Community Service has been awarded by the BCRC, beginning in 1998, 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.*

*It’s a great pleasure for me to present this year’s Bongartz Award to one of those local officials that I’ve always relied on over the years – for anything and everything in the beautiful Town of Sunderland:*

*After serving a few years as a Town Auditor, Rose Keough was elected to be Sunderland’s Town Clerk and Treasurer in March 1991 and, after that first contested election, no one ran against her for the next 30 years, suggesting a rather high job approval rating, I’d say! Rose attributes much of her passion for her work in government to her grandmother, Harriet Stone, who also was Sunderland’s Town Clerk and Treasurer, and even represented the Town in the Vermont Legislature.*

*Rose is fiercely proud of Sunderland (maybe even a little protective!) – and has seen a lot of changes and worked with many different town officials over the years. Whether or not they have agreed on issues, Rose always has respected their roles and their shared commitment to their community – and that respect certainly has been returned.*

*From personal experience, I can tell you that those officials came to rely on Rose – her knowledge of state laws, local regulations, proper procedures, and more. And everyone at the BCRC relied on Rose, whether to locate important documents and reports, to make local connections, or to arrange meetings – of late in the lovely new town office building where Rose moved the Clerk and Treasurer’s office – from its previous location in her “garage.” (Now while we called the Sunderland Town Office “Rose’s Garage” for years, you should know that it was as neat, organized, and efficient as any municipal office!)*

*Special note: Today is Rose’s birthday! So join me in wishing her a Happy Birthday, and thanking her for her years of dedicated community service.*

4. Recognition of Jim Sullivan at his last BCRC Annual Meeting. With Sullivan retiring in December, BCRC staff and officers collaborated to assemble kind words reflecting on Jim’s work with the Commission, and then presented him with custom glassware from Simon Pierce, suitable for drinking fine Vermont craft beers. Sullivan was surprised, humbled, and deeply appreciative.
5. Josh Hanford, Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development presented an overview of housing initiatives coming out of the recently completed legislative session, including substantial new funding for various innovative housing development and enhancement

programs as well as regulatory reform that should improve and expedite permitting for important housing projects at both the state and local levels. He then answered a series of questions from the audience. The full presentation and discussion can be viewed on the recording (link at the top of these Minutes).

6. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:32 PM.