Greetings!

Thank you for taking a look at this month’s issue of News and Notes. It is filled with great examples of collaboration with other organizations and groups, leading to stronger and more vibrant communities. TRORC’s economic development efforts were recognized by a statewide planning group and our staff continued to grow professionally to serve our communities, businesses and residents. None of us can afford to sit still. We must seize opportunities when they present themselves, and we strive to position TRORC to be ready when they do. TRORC’s recent award of a $400,000 brownfields grant is an example of that. None of this could happen without the expertise of staff, the leadership and dedication of our Board of Directors and the countless hours of local volunteer time that come together to make a difference. Onward!

Sincerely,

Peter G. Gregory, Executive Director

Plan of the Year

“ECV: What We Want” named VPA “Plan of the Year”

Vermont Planning Association has awarded both TRORC and Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission with their Plan of the Year Award for the two RPCs work on developing the “East Central Vermont: What We Want” Plan. The Plan explicitly acknowledges regional challenges, and aims to create a more sustainable 40-town region. The plan covers the 40-town combined region, and it represents a consortium of dozens of organizations, towns, agencies, and citizens that worked on developing it, as well as several formal organizational partners that lent valuable expertise. As Kevin Geiger of TRORC says, “this plan is a beautiful, readable, honest look at several planning issues and a set of actions, many with measures charting progress, aimed at creating change that moves us toward a sustainable way of living.” The organization of the plan ensured that each vision had at least one goal, and that policies related to that goal, and then actions to those policies. Many congratulations to all staff at TRORC and SWCRPC who participated in this effort over many years, including TRORC’s own Loralee Morrow and Kevin Geiger!
**EPA Awards TRORC Brownfields Assessment Grant Funding**

TRORC has just been awarded its sixth brownfields assessment grant by the US Environmental Protection Agency. This $400,000 grant will allow TRORC to continue work it has done since 2001 in assessing sites that are or may be contaminated.

Contamination concerns keep valuable parcels from being redeveloped and create an unnecessary drag on our economy. Assessments are the first part of the process of returning sites to full use. Past grants have assessed sites in Randolph, Hartford, Bradford, Sharon, Woodstock, Newbury, Hancock, Chelsea, Thetford, Royalton, and Topsham. This grant will focus on assisting sites in Randolph, Bradford, Hartford, and Bethel, but will be available in all 30 towns covered by TRORC. The project will work with a variety of partners to identify sites that may have contamination issues, are underutilized, and that have solid reuse potential and community interest. The grant will begin in the fall, but owners or prospective buyers of such sites can call Kevin Geiger at TRORC any time for confidential discussions regarding plans for sites at (802) 457-3188 or via e-mail at kgeiger@trorc.org.

**Zoning Must Conform to Municipal Plan**

Municipal Plans are required by law to be updated every five years, which means that TRORC’s communities generally have a plan that represents a reasonably up-to-date and timely vision for the future in that town. Unlike Municipal Plans, there is no requirement as to when zoning or subdivision regulations should be updated. However, statute is explicit that, while communities may regulate land development, those regulations must be in conformance with the Plan and state planning goals (§ 4302).

A municipality that has adopted a plan through its bylaws may define and regulate land development in any manner that the municipality establishes in its bylaws, provided those bylaws are in conformance with the plan and are adopted for the purposes set forth in section 4302 of this title. (V.S.A. Title 24, §4410)

We have communities that have not updated their zoning or subdivision regulations in a very long time. While we recognize that the process of revising land use regulations can be lengthy and time consuming, it is important to remember that any such regulations must conform to the Municipal Plan. It is assumed that once an update to a Plan occurs, that the Planning Commission will follow up by revising their land use regulations to conform to the newly adopted Plan. For example, if a community stated in its Plan that it encouraged multi-family residential in a commercial area (such as a downtown), the zoning bylaw should reflect that. Communities that choose not to revise their land use regulations to be consistent with the Town Plan could enable conflict in regulatory proceedings.

If your community is due for a revision of zoning or subdivision regulations, please contact us to determine whether or not a Municipal Planning Grant could be used to assist with the revision. E-mail Chris Sargent at csargent@trorc.org or 802-457-3188, ext. 12.
Loralee Morrow Graduates from Economic Development Institute

TRORC Regional Planner Loralee Morrow graduated from the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute on May 7, 2015 at the OU EDI spring session held in Nashville, TN. OU EDI is an intensive, three-tier program which provides a broad spectrum of advanced education for the economic development professional. Classes focus on three major core areas including: Business Retention and Expansion, Real Estate, and Finance, as well as areas of concentration in Marketing, Strategic Planning, Entrepreneurship, and Managing Economic Development Organizations. Students complete 117 hours of instruction with curriculum selected from more than fifty seminars, workshops and discussion groups. Many congratulations to Loralee on this professional achievement!

Kevin Geiger Presents at the American Planning Association National Planning Conference in Seattle

Besides having green on their license plates and skiing, Vermont and Colorado both have flood risk assessors and planners thinking about them. Kevin Geiger, TRORC Senior Planner, and Abby Shannon, the Long Range Planning Manager from the Boulder County Land Use Department, presented a workshop at this year’s APA conference in Seattle, titled “The Nitty-Gritty Route to Resilience.” The presentation drew on the two state’s and planners’ experience, largely on flood recovery from Tropical Storm Irene in Vermont and from severe flooding in September of 2013 in Boulder County. They focused on practical lessons learned, such as the need for planners to build relationships with emergency managers, the important role that regional staff can play assisting small towns with state and federal programs, the challenges of flood permitting in the immediate aftermath, and the ins and outs of FEMA and HUD recovery funds. Both areas are in the process of buying out over 100 homes damaged by the floods. The session was moderated by Kristin Cisowski, a planner and attorney in Clarion Associates’ Denver office, who attended Vermont Law School when Irene hit.

Vermont Forest Stewardship Atlas Collaboration

In 2015, TRORC worked with other RPCs and VT Dept. of Forest Parks & Recreation to develop a Forest Stewardship Atlas (http://tinyurl.com/q9yknb4). This portal provides access to geographic data related to forests. Over 50 forestry-related datasets are organized into six different themes: Productivity, Ecological Resources, Water Resources, Scenic and Recreational Resources, Human and Environmental Constraints, and Stewardship. The site allows you to view, identify and query datasets; print and export maps; and compile output summary reports for geographic areas and layers. This collaborative effort follows on work done with Vermont Natural Resources Council in 2012 to create a Landscape Based Forest Stewardship Plan for the TRORC Region (http://tinyurl.com/pfkrxv8), identifying priority forest landscapes, forest-based values, threats, existing conservation measures, and prospective strategies to maintain forestlands.
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