

News & Notes

February 2016



Two Rivers-Ottauquechee

REGIONAL COMMISSION

128 King Farm Road | Woodstock, Vermont 05091 | 802-457-3188 | trorc.org

In this issue: Affordable Housing, Creative Economy, Solar Siting, Municipal Planning Grants, Better Roads Program, Chelsea Floodplain Assessment, Congratulations to Randolph and Newbury, Quintown

Affordable Housing in the Upper Valley

'A Home for All' is the first of many videos that TRORC hopes to publish for the community to help reach a wider audience on TRORC's work. With increased housing costs, and a limited housing stock, the workforce population has found it progressively more difficult to buy homes. The need for affordable housing also reaches to seniors and young adults just out of school. All of these various groups make up the vibrant communities we live in, and without affordable housing we run the risk of losing not just those groups, but also the prospect of new residents in our community.



Safford Commons | © TRORC Staff

The video focuses on why affordable housing is essential to maintaining our communities and culture in the Upper Valley. It features speakers from town officials, representatives from advocacy groups and affordable housing developers as well as staff from TRORC. Our hope is that the video can help break down the barriers of assumptions held by community members about the people in need of affordable housing. Through the AmeriCorps VISTA program, TRORC has dedicated staff whose focus is on projects relating to alleviating poverty in the region. Former VISTA member Pollaidh Major started the project in 2014 and the current VISTA member, Chris Damiani, wrapped up the video with editing and additional film footage. In the future TRORC plans to publish other informational pieces as well as trainings on a variety of topics.

You can access 'A Home for All' as well as other videos at www.youtube.com/trorcvt. For more information about this project, contact Chris Damiani at cdamiani@trorc.org

Implementing ECV: What We Want Goal F: Provide adequate, affordable, and safe workforce housing for residents.

Status of Creative Economy Inventory and Action Plan

Our first Steering Committee Meeting was held Wednesday, February 3, 5:30 PM at Salisbury Square in Randolph, Vermont. The meeting was open to the public, and we had a good turn-out. The consultants have already conducted several one-on-one interviews and two focus groups. More focus groups will be scheduled soon.

For more information about the project, contact Loralee Morrow at lmorrow@trorc.org or check out the District website at evedd.org.

Implementing CEDS Goal #2: An Innovative Business Environment and East Central Vermont: What We Want Goal H: Economic growth that supports and enhances our working landscapes and craftspeople.

Solar Siting Ordinances

We have been contacted by a number of communities who are considering the development and adoption of solar siting ordinances, in the hopes that we might have examples of communities that have already developed them. Because the legislative authority for solar screening regulations was only passed in July of 2015, there are no examples available in our region at this time, and very few statewide. As a result, many of you will be breaking new ground as you develop these ordinances. As you move forward, there are several key things to remember:



Tracking solar array | © Green Energy Times

1. Communities are only enabled to create solar screening requirements. Specific setbacks for solar are mandated in statute, and cannot be regulated at the local level (see V.S.A. Title 30, Section 248(s)).
2. If your community has zoning, solar screening requirements cannot be more restrictive than what you apply to all commercial development.
3. Your screening requirements may not prohibit or have the effect of prohibiting the installation of a solar generation facility or hinder its ability to operate.

Screening regulations may be incorporated into existing zoning or developed as a stand-alone ordinance. While solar energy generation facilities are still exempt from zoning under V.S.A. Title 24, Section 4414(b), the Public Service Board is now required to impose municipal solar screening requirements as a condition of a certificate of public good (provided those requirements do not make solar impossible to develop). TRORC staff would be more than happy to meet with your community to discuss solar siting in more detail.

Contact Chris Sargent at csargent@trorc.org for more information.

Municipal Planning Grants Awarded!

In December, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) announced the statewide awards for the Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) Program. The MPG program is Vermont's long-standing planning grant funding. Much of this funding has been used in our region to produce municipal plans, zoning, subdivision, and flood bylaws and other special studies and projects. As always, TRORC had a hand in helping a majority of the eight towns apply for funding through this program.

Six out of eight applicants were awarded funding, including the towns of Fairlee, Hancock, Hartford, Newbury, Stockbridge and Strafford. Total grant funding awarded amounted to \$69,135 (the highest regional total in the state) to be applied to \$79,726 in total project costs, leaving just over \$10,000 in actual cost to the applicants. Projects range from municipal plan updates, zoning revisions, to village center and downtown studies. The MPG program represents a substantial value to our small towns, allowing them to do good planning at reduced cost to the community.

For more information about this program, contact Chris Sargent at csargent@trorc.org.

Better Roads Grant Accepting Applications for FY2017

The 2017 Better Roads Applications are out and due Friday April 15, 2016. The program has expanded funding in response to the Clean Water Act with Category A Planning increased to \$10,000 and Categories B/C/D (Implementation to reduce sediment erosion and improve water quality) are capped at \$40,000. There is a 20% local match required. The Vermont Better Roads Program's goal is to promote the use of erosion control and maintenance techniques that save money while protecting and enhancing Vermont's lakes and streams.

Please contact Rita Seto at rseto@trorc.org or 457-3188 for project application assistance.



Stockbridge culvert before it was repaired with Better Roads funding | © TRORC Staff

Implementing ECV: What We Want Goal E: Ensure public infrastructure supports and sustains a viable economy and environment.

TRORC Begins Chelsea Village Floodplain Risk Assessment

The Town of Chelsea is divided north-south by VT Rt.110 that runs parallel to the First Branch of the White River. In the center of the Village of Chelsea, the confluence of the Jail Branch with the First Branch of the White River results in portions of the Village being subjected to frequent spring ice jams and flooding. Within the last two years, VTrans has focused on the 2017 scheduled rehabilitation of State Highway Bridge 9 and State Highway Bridge 11 on VT Rt.110 that are located on either end of the Village spanning the First Branch. Concerns about both bridges' hydraulic capacity during the bridge design phase brought further discussion of the overall flood risk of the Village and of the insufficient hydraulic capacity of Bridge 10, Bridge 45 on Maple Avenue and Bridge 43 that all span the Jail Branch. TRORC hired Dubois & King to conduct the flood study under these two bridges. VTrans agreed to fund TRORC to conduct this study.

If you would like more information about this project, contact Pete Fellows at pfellows@trorc.org.

Congratulations to the Randolph Energy Committee and the Town of Newbury!

The Randolph Energy Committee received the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN) 'Best in State for 2015' award for their extensive work in the region that includes a three-year street lighting project, hosting a regional energy exposition, and helping 41 homes go solar. Another project they organized was the Central Vermont Solar Forum geared towards other energy committees and other groups to discuss solar siting issues with developers, state and town representatives, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Great job for all your hard work!

Congratulations also to Newbury Village and Wells River Village who were recently granted state Village Designation with application assistance from TRORC. This brings up our regional total to 22 designated villages!

For more information about the Village Designation program, contact Loralee Morrow at lmorrow@trorc.org.



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Photo: 7th graders collaborate by planting a tree with the White River Partnership | © Greg Russ, WRP

Quintown Collaborative: Preparing for the Next Flood Together

The "Quintown Collaborative: Preparing for the Next Flood Together" project is a partnership between TRORC, the White River Partnership (WRP), and community members, funded by the High Meadow Fund. The project goal is to build support for on-the-ground projects that make Quintown communities safe and the White River healthy. In 2011 Tropical Storm Irene devastated the Quintown Valley, which includes the towns of Granville, Hancock, Rochester, Stockbridge, and Pittsfield along the Upper White River. Come join us this summer to see completed flood resilience projects and to learn about new opportunities to prepare the Quintown Valley for the next flood.

Contact Mary Russ at mary@whiteriverpartnership.org or Victoria Levite at vlevite@trorc.org for more information.

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