

RELATIONSHIP OF TRORC REGIONAL PLAN TO NEIGHBORING PLANS

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Quechee Balloon Festival | © Jericho Hills Photography

A. Relationship to Plans of Adjoining Vermont Commissions

Five Vermont regional planning commissions, and one New Hampshire regional planning commission, border the TRO Region.

All six of these have a current regional plan in effect. Below are the dates of their adoption:

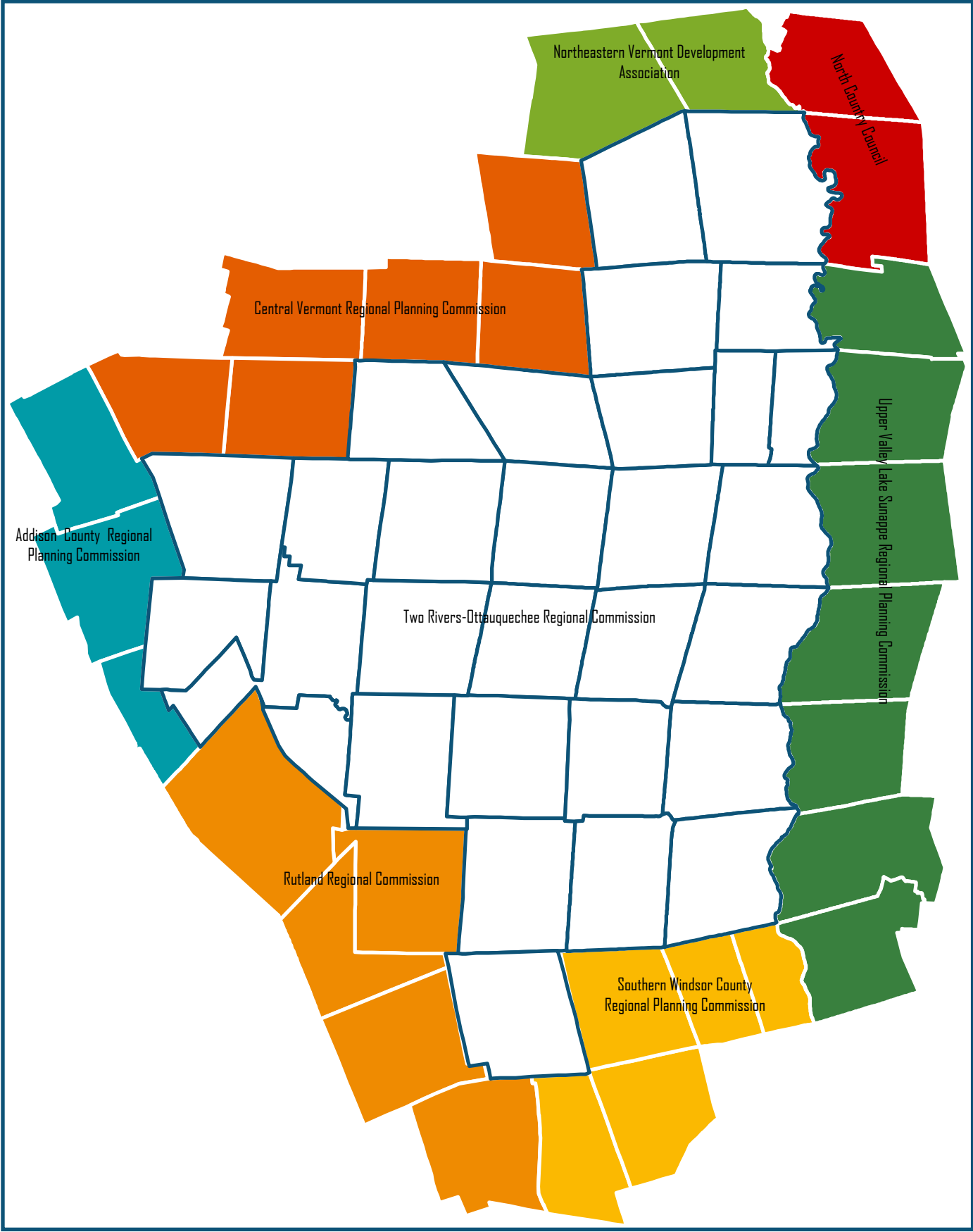
- Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (SWCRPC): Plan adopted November 18, 2014
- Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC): Plan adopted June 16, 2015
- Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC): Plan adopted March 9, 2016
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association, Inc. (NVDA): Plan adopted August 27, 2015
- Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC): Plan adopted July 12, 2016

- Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC): Plan adopted June 17, 2015

TRORC consults and coordinates with neighboring regional planning commissions during their planning processes. Our largest and most interconnected neighboring region is that of the UVLS Region, and to further coordinate, our executive directors are currently representatives on each other's board of directors.

For an issue to rise to the level where we feel that there needs to be coordination, a neighboring region's plan must affect us or we must affect our neighbors in a meaningful way. This could be a small matter that is literally on the border of two regions, such as exit 17 on I-91, or a larger matter that has effects for some distance, such as employment at centers like Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

Figure 13-1: Surrounding Regional Planning Commissions



Land Use

All adjoining regional planning commissions identify regional areas that are intended to support high densities of development. Some nearby regional areas, such as Windsor, Rutland, Middlebury, St. Johnsbury, and Lebanon and Hanover in New Hampshire could have an effect on the TRO Region if they were to expand, but there are no land use conflicts noted between what adjacent regional planning commissions and ours see as desired future regional patterns of development.

Most municipalities that border our Region are quite rural, with the exception of UVLS Region towns Lebanon and Hanover, which are considered economic hubs for our Region where residents do most of their shopping. Hartford, and to some extent Norwich, tie in relatively seamlessly with their adjacent New Hampshire towns. Windsor, Vermont, adjacent to Hartland, is largely rural, but it does have some commercial development in its downtown. However, the future land use map for the SWC Region matches that of the TRO Region in that the bordering area is designated to remain primarily rural outside the town centers of Windsor and Hartland, keeping this stretch of U.S. 5 free from sprawl.

Watersheds

The TRO Region shares several watersheds with neighboring regional planning commissions. The TRO Region receives the Connecticut River and Wells River watersheds from the NVDA Region. The Connecticut goes through a series of three dams known as Fifteen Mile Falls, just above our Region, and is managed for both hydropower production and flood control. The water quality of the river is quite good, as it drains a largely rural and forested area. The TRO Region then shares the Connecticut with the UVLS Region and the SWC Region as it flows south. Several smaller rivers from New Hampshire and Vermont empty into the Connecticut River along our border. The

Wilder Dam between Hartford, Vermont, and Lebanon, New Hampshire, impounds almost all of the upstream reach of the Connecticut in our Region. As the Wilder Dam is in both states, both regional planning commissions are involved in its relicensing. The Connecticut River Joint Commission (on which TRORC and UVLSRPC sit) is also involved in the relicensing and serves as a bi-state body to coordinate issues around the Connecticut River.

Downstream of us, the river flows into the SWC Region and the rest of the watershed, all the way to Long Island Sound. Nitrogen is a pollutant issue in the Sound, and it is therefore a matter of concern even in our Region.

With the exception of some small upland areas in the outermost reaches of the watershed, most of the TRO Region forms the entire watershed for the White River. This major river empties into the Connecticut River in the aptly named White River Junction village in Hartford. The flooding that occurred as a result of Tropical Storm Irene serves as an example of the White River impacting downstream communities. Though the White River is usually much smaller in size, during this flooding event it was flowing at an estimated 90,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), almost three times the flow of the Connecticut, at the two rivers' confluence. Not only did the fury of the White River render a highway bridge and a rail bridge in Hartford unusable, it also transported significant amounts of silt, pollutants, and debris, which ultimately entered the Connecticut River and impacted towns downstream. Similarly, though the TRO Region is the host to just a small portion of the headwaters of the Black River, which runs through SWC Region, major erosion in Plymouth from Irene caused siltation to affect downstream waters in Ludlow.

The lower portion of the TRO Region is in the Ottauquechee River watershed, with headwaters beginning in Killington, part of RRPC's region. The Ottauquechee is an

important part of the Quechee area of Hartford, providing a scenic center to Quechee Village as well as the significant attraction of Quechee Gorge. Flooding during Irene heavily damaged the covered bridge in Quechee. Just below the Gorge, the Ottauquechee is held behind the North Hartland dam run by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This dam is operated for flood control, protecting communities along the Connecticut River as the Ottauquechee flows south.

Water quality and quantity are issues that tie the regions together. All agree that improving water quality is a priority. Adjacent Regional Plans are also very cognizant of flooding as an important issue. No conflicts are noted when it comes to watershed and water quality planning.

Economic Development

The TRO Region is tied to the state, national, and international economies of course, but of more direct concern are the local employment links with other nearby regions. Many of our residents commute to municipalities outside of our Region for work, shopping, and other needs. While some people commute into the TRO Region, most of our economic ties are outward. On our western edge, Rutland and Middlebury are economic centers, while to our north, the Barre/Montpelier area draws commuters. However, the biggest connection is

with Hanover and Lebanon, New Hampshire, to the east. These two towns are considered the economic hub of the bi-state Upper Valley region (consisting of TRORC, SWCRPC, and UVLSRPC), providing most of the shopping and employment. TRORC and SWCRPC are part of a 40-town organization called the East Central Vermont Economic Development District (ECVEDD). This organization is a federally designated area whose mission is to “provide access to resources, facilitate partnerships, and support economic decision making” and “provide resources and facilitation as regions make decisions that will affect entrepreneurs, businesses, and communities.” None of the current economic development plans for adjacent areas are viewed as detrimental to the TRO Region.

Transportation

There are several major highway transportation routes that pass through the TRO Region, including Interstates 91 and 89, Vermont Route 100, and U.S. Routes 302, 4, and 5. Highways function much like pipelines, in that any problems at a particular spot can affect the entire system. Therefore, planning around construction projects or larger developments that would have an effect on traffic are by their nature matters of concern across regional boundaries.



One Main Tap & Grill, Randolph | © First Light Studios

The I-89 and I-91 corridors are considered major thoroughfares for people traveling to Canada, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. U.S. 5 is the main non-interstate road on the Vermont side of the Connecticut River, and U.S. 4 and 302 remain main east-west corridors, with U.S. 4 being a primary artery for traffic coming from New York State. VT Route 100 is a major connector for AC Region, SWC Region, and RR Region residents to the Green Mountains in the westernmost part of our Region.

None of the neighboring regional planning commissions has plans that would adversely impact the function of these roads. It should be noted that bridges across the Connecticut River are built by NHDOT, as the Vermont border is generally the western shore of the river. Both state transportation agencies cooperate when planning construction on these bridges.

The TRO Region is also home to a freight rail line that parallels U.S. 5 and a rail line that has both freight and Amtrak service that cuts diagonally across the Region. Both of these are important to the Region and are also supported by other regions and the state level.

There are no airports of significance in the TRO Region, but Lebanon, New Hampshire, does have a small regional airport, and both TRORC and UVLSRPC recognize the importance of this airport.

Transit services exist in the Region that cross into neighboring areas, with a commuter bus line that goes north to Montpelier and routes on the VT/NH border that cross over and provide good options in the Hanover/Lebanon/Hartford area. All neighboring regional planning commissions highly support maintaining and increasing transit options.

Housing

Much of the TRO Region serves as a bedroom community for larger towns, especially the

economic centers just to our east.

Currently, TRORC, SWCRPC, and UVLSRPC are jointly working on developing a region-wide housing needs analysis to identify areas that need more housing to serve the Upper Valley. All of the regional planning commissions in the area support increased housing that is affordable for both residents that are currently paying too much and new families that we are trying to attract to the region, as well as needed additions to the housing stock that are handicapped accessible or senior friendly to deal with the demographics of a rapidly aging population.

B. Municipal Plans within the TRO Region

There are 30 member municipalities that comprise the TRO Region. All municipalities have duly appointed planning commissions charged with the responsibility of planning for the future growth and development of their respective communities. As is the case in many areas of Vermont, the extent or nature of these local planning programs is varied. Several communities have had planning programs in existence since the late 1960s. As a result, these programs are relatively advanced. Other towns, particularly those removed from development pressure, are somewhat inactive and may have allowed their plans to expire. Implementation programs, including zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, or capital budgets and programs exist for approximately two-thirds of the municipalities comprising the Region. TRORC provides technical assistance in the preparation of most of the Town Plans as well as subsequent bylaws. TRORC also provides regular training and assistance to towns on preparing plans and administering bylaws. Experience has indicated that these services are valuable resources to local planning efforts.

Towns are not required to but may request regional approval of their locally adopted

plans. In conducting a formal review of these municipal plans, TRORC determines if these plans are:

1. Consistent with the goals in 24 VSA §4302;
2. Compatible with the Regional Plan;
3. Compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the Region; and
4. Contain the elements of a plan outlined in 24 VSA §4382.

Twice in an eight-year period, regional planning commissions are also required to meet with communities to discuss their municipal planning process and report on how effectively the municipality's planning process is meeting state planning goals. Municipalities in our Region have already used the results of these consultations to improve their municipal plans and better comply with state planning goals.

Since both Town and Regional Plans have basically the same required elements, they naturally look somewhat like each other. The regional plan must, and Town Plans may (unless seeking regional approval, as most do), also be consistent with the same set of state planning goals, furthering the similarities between the two. To the extent feasible, this Plan has been developed to reflect the general planning goals and policies expressed in plans of our member municipalities while ensuring consistency with state planning law. During the preparation of this Plan, Commissioners and staff attempted to maintain a close and coordinated working relationship with local public officials and the general public on matters relating to the purpose and application of this Plan, understanding that Town Plans often have more detailed maps and policies than the Region does.

Goals and Recommendations: Relationship of TRO Regional Plan to Neighboring Plans

Goals

1. Plans for the TRO Region and neighboring regions are mutually compatible.
2. Municipal Plans are compatible with the Regional Plan.

Recommendations

1. TRORC will continue to actively coordinate with neighboring commissions and other organizations to achieve planning goals.
2. TRORC will work with other regional planning commissions to influence state and national policies that support our communities.
3. TRORC will actively participate in the permitting and planning of development, infrastructure, or services outside the Region that can impact the Region.
4. TRORC will work with member towns when updating their Town Plans in order to consider being compatible with plans of neighboring towns.