

TRORC

Two Rivers-Ottauquechee REGIONAL COMMISSION



News & Notes January 2024



[TRORC Website](#)

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PROJECT UPDATES AND REMINDERS

Four Towns Win Municipal Planning Grants

On December 19th, the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development announced awards for the [2024 Municipal Planning Grant \(MPG\) program](#). Four of the region's towns were awarded grants, **ranging from \$13,000 to \$30,000**. The Towns of **Braintree and Chelsea** received Bylaw Modernization Grants (BMGs—a subset of the MPG program) to fund TRORC's assistance in rewriting local zoning bylaws.

The Towns of **Fairlee and Strafford** also received MPGs. Strafford's grant will fund TRORC's work in developing a capital budget and program, which helps towns plan for future infrastructure and facilities costs. Fairlee will use the funds to conduct a structural and use assessment of its town-owned building stock.

All 30 TRORC Towns Granted Free Energy Audits for Municipal Buildings

Every town in the TRORC region has now been awarded at least one audit through the State of Vermont's [Municipal Energy Resilience Program \(MERP\)](#). The ARPA-funded audits, which are provided free of charge to towns, will assess municipally-owned buildings for their energy performance. Once completed, the audit reports will provide recommendations for insulation and air-sealing and present options for switching to electric HVAC systems and installing on-site power generation and EV charging equipment. Towns can then apply for a **MERP Project Grant of up to \$500,000** to conduct these energy upgrades. Project grant applications are expected to open this summer.

Please contact [Harry Falconer](#) for more information.

Randolph and Bridgewater Awarded Community Development Block Grants

On December 14th, [Governor Phil Scott announced over \\$4.5 million](#) in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awards through the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP). Two towns in the TRORC region were awarded funds. **Randolph's Playhouse Theater was awarded a \$54,000 Planning Grant** to develop architectural plans to make the building ADA-compliant. Meanwhile, the **Bridgewater Community Center was awarded a \$47,000 enhancement** to continue the work begun using a \$400,000 CDBG Implementation Grant from 2020. These two rounds of funding are being used to support the conversion of Bridgewater's historic Village School to a multi-use Community Center featuring licensed childcare and senior programming.



An ice jam encroaches on Route 14 along the White River in West Hartford | Photo: Kevin Geiger, TRORC Staff

December Sets New Precipitation Record for Region

December, 2023 was one of the wettest on record for Vermont. Several large rain events brought elevated levels of precipitation to much of the state. The Burlington area saw nearly six inches in December—more than double the previous record.

With no summer foliage or groundcover, **heavy precipitation in winter months can lead to winter flood events**, including ice jams, road washouts and slope erosion. All 30 towns in our region have flood regulations in place. Flood regulations ensure development in flood zones is reasonably safe from flooding. However, not all flood damage occurs in mapped flood zones. According to FEMA, nearly 25% of flood claims occur outside of flood zones.

Make sure you and your community are prepared for future flood events. Anticipating flood events, both in and outside of flood zones, can reduce the risk to life and property and make our communities safer. For resources to address flooding, see the [State of Vermont Flood Ready website](#) and our [About Floods](#) page.





Lori Kay Retires as TRORC Finance Manager, Two New Additions to the TRORC Team

Please join us in wishing a **happy retirement to Lori Kay**! Lori's last day as TRORC's Finance Manager was January 12th.

Our new Finance Manager is [Mary Olmo](#), who brings her own wealth of experience to the position. In addition, TRORC has recently hired [Bryan Kovalick](#) as a new member of the planning team. Bryan is a recent graduate of the University of Illinois at Chicago's Master of Urban Planning program.

(Above, from left) Lori Kay retired as TRORC's Finance Manager on January 12th; Mary Olmo is the new Finance Manager; Bryan Kovalick joined the staff as a Planner starting in early December.

Eight Towns Apply for VTRANS Better Roads Grants

With assistance from TRORC Transportation Manager [Rita Seto](#), eight towns—**Bethel, Corinth, Granville, Pomfret, Sharon, Strafford, Tunbridge, and Woodstock**—have applied for Better

Roads Grants from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTRANS).

The Vermont Better Roads Program promotes the use of erosion control and maintenance techniques that save money while protecting and enhancing water quality around the State. Many towns use Category B (\$20,000) to assist with their Municipal Roads General Permit compliance, with a focus on improving ditching and cross culverts.

(Opposite) A view of Town Farm Road in Sharon from the cab of a highway department truck | Photo: Rita Seto, TRORC Staff



2024 TRORC Scholarship Program Now Open

TRORC recently [announced the opening of applications](#) for its annual scholarship program. The program seeks to "encourage and recognize high school students pursuing career and life choices consistent with the vision and values of vibrant, diverse and sustainable communities."

Up to ten \$2,000 scholarships will be awarded. Applications are due by April 12th. See our website for [full program and application information](#).

Please contact [Mary Olmo](#) with any questions.

Downtown Board Approves Pittsfield Village Designation Renewal

On Monday November 27th, 2023, the Vermont Downtown Board approved the Town of Pittsfield’s Village Center Designation renewal application. The Village Center Designation process recognizes and encourages local efforts to revitalize Vermont’s traditional villages. Once designated, the community receives priority consideration for state grants (MPG, VCDP) and other resources and support. Commercial property owners are eligible for tax credits to support building improvements.

The Town of Pittsfield worked with TRORC staff to develop the renewal application for the program.

For more information, including how to apply for Downtown and Village Designation, please visit the [Department of Housing and Community Development’s Community Revitalization](#) website.

If your community is interested in applying for Village Designation, please contact [Bryan Kovalick](#).

Important Reminder: Local ARPA Funds

With FY25 municipal budget planning well underway, now is the time to think about obligating your town's ARPA funds. A couple of key considerations:

1. **Local ARPA funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024.** Obligation means an order has been placed for goods or services or you have entered into a contract, subaward, or similar transaction that requires payment. If you are using ARPA funds to pay staff salaries or other internal costs, this needs to be documented with a resolution by the Selectboard.
 2. There is a lot of flexibility in how ARPA funds can be spent **BUT THERE ARE ALSO SOME PROHIBITED EXPENDITURE CATEGORIES.** If you don't feel confident in your knowledge of what's allowed, please contact [Sarah Wraight](#) ASAP.
 3. **If you don't think your town can obligate all its funds by December 31, 2024, OR if you can obligate but won't be able to spend the funds by December 31, 2026** (perhaps because of permitting timeframes and the fact that contractors are booking out several years in advance at this point), please contact [Sarah Wraight](#) ASAP to discuss your options.
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TRORC Staffer Kyle Katz Earns Certified Floodplain Manager Credential

[Kyle Katz](#), Planner, was just accredited as a [Certified Floodplain Manager \(CFM\) by the Association of State Floodplain Managers](#). The CFM designation takes considerable study and is the main national accreditation that shows a person is well-versed in floodplain regulations and their administration. Kyle has helped several towns work on their flood regulations, making the Region a safer place. Having sound town floodplain regulations is required for people to be able to buy flood insurance in that town, averts flood damage, and saves towns money on disaster recovery costs. **TRORC now has three Certified Flood Managers on staff.**

Reminder: State Law Changes Mean New Housing is Allowed As-of-Right in Many Places

Vermont has continued to broaden what towns must allow for housing in their zoning through legislation. More action is expected this year, but local zoning administrators and review bodies should remember that, regardless of what bylaws say, [accessory dwelling units and duplexes are now widely permitted](#). TRORC staff are helping towns bring their regulations up to, and even beyond, these requirements.

For more information on our housing efforts, contact [Kevin Geiger](#).

RFPs and RFQs

Chelsea Wastewater Treatment Plant RFQ

TRORC recently released a [new Request for Qualifications \(RFQ\) for engineering and design services](#) on behalf of the Town of Chelsea. The Town seeks a qualified engineering firm to rebuild the pump station at its wastewater treatment plant and conduct other necessary upgrades.

Proposals are due **February 2nd, 2024 at 4:00 pm** via email.

For more information, please [visit our website](#) or contact [Harry Falconer](#).

GRANTS & FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Free ADA Audits from the Vermont Center for Independent Living

The Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) offers [free accessibility audits for municipal buildings and businesses](#). These audits can help you determine solutions for bringing public buildings into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). VCIL cannot estimate costs, but they can identify needs and potential solutions, which will be extremely helpful in getting quotes from contractors. These audits are just one of many services offered by VCIL. Check out [their website](#) for the full list.

If you are interested, please contact Peter Johnke at peter@vcil.org or (802) 224-1815.

TRORC Brownfields Assessment Funding

As a reminder, TRORC has funding from the EPA to assess brownfield sites in the TRORC region, and has received \$1,600,000 over the past decade to perform petroleum and hazardous waste assessments. TRORC works closely with Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation staff to promote redevelopment of brownfields properties, including enrolling properties in Vermont’s Brownfields Reuse and Environmental Liability Limitation Act ([BRELLA](#)) program.

For more information, please see our [brownfields webpage](#) or contact [Sarah Wraight](#).
