

**Southern Windsor County
Regional Planning Commission**

Minutes of Tuesday, March 22, 2016
Springfield Town Hall, Springfield, VT

Commissioners Present: Tom Bock (Chair), Chester; Carol Lighthall (Vice Chair), Baltimore; Walter Martone (Alt.), Springfield; Joe Fromberger, Andover; Tom Kenyon, West Windsor; Kathy Rondeau, Reading; Norm Vanasse, Ludlow.

Staff Present: Jason Rasmussen, Dan Potter, Chris Titus.

Tom Bock opened the meeting at 12:06 PM.

1. Secretary's Report
 - a. *Walter Martone made a motion to approve the February 24, 2016 Secretary's Report as presented. Second by Norm Vanasse. Motion passed. Joe Fromberger abstained.*
2. Treasurer's Report
 - a. *Joe Fromberger made a motion to accept the February 2016 Treasurer's Report. Second by Tom Kenyon. Motion passed.*
 - b. Jason Rasmussen reported that Tom Kennedy and Cynthia Porter met yesterday with Sullivan and Powers, the new auditor, and the meeting went well.
3. Transportation Priorities
 - a. Regional Transportation Project Prioritization
 - 1) Jason Rasmussen reviewed the Transportation Advisory Committee's recommendations for project prioritization, which were included in the agenda packet. Discussion included the methodology used to establish regional priorities and how VTrans made final decisions.
 - 2) *Carol Lighthall made a motion to approve the Regional Transportation Project Prioritization for FY 2018 as recommended by the Transportation Advisory Committee. Second by Joe Fromberger. Motion passed.*
 - b. Town Highway Bridge Program Pre-Candidate Projects
 - 1) Jason Rasmussen reviewed the Transportation Advisory Committee's recommendations for pre-candidate projects to be considered for inclusion in the Town Highway Bridge Program. The recommendations as well as the methodology used to create the rankings were included in the agenda packet.
 - 2) *Joe Fromberger made a motion to approve the Town Highway Bridge Program Pre-Candidate Project list as recommended by the Transportation Advisory Committee. Second by Walter Martone. Motion passed.*
 - c. There was also discussion about how VTrans decides how to spend their money. The Board asked staff to talk with VTrans about equitably spreading funds statewide.

4. Brownfields

- a. Dan Potter reported on the Brownfields Steering Committee meeting. They met to review a proposal for using 2013 Hazardous Assessment funding for the Jones and Lamson site in Springfield. Springfield Regional Development Corporation is requesting \$30,000 to pay for a plan for asbestos abatement at this site. The Committee recommends approving this proposal. This project is related to other work that will be accomplished as outcomes of the ongoing BERA Program, including \$60,000 for a demolition study.
- b. *Joe Fromberger made a motion to approve the recommendation of the Brownfields Steering Committee to spend up to \$30,000 for an asbestos remediation assessment for the Jones and Lamson Building on Clinton Street in Springfield. Second by Carol Lighthall. Motion passed.*

5. Proposed Coolidge Solar Project in Ludlow

- a. Dan Potter summarized the proposed project for a 20 MW ground-mounted solar power project to be located along Barker Road in Ludlow. The panels will cover about 88 acres of land area. It is anticipated to be a 20-year project. There were questions about whether it would be extended for additional time. It is located within the Regional Plan's resource area. There is no mandatory language in the Regional Plan that would preclude this project, but the Regional Plan does seek to minimize natural resource impacts.
- b. Dan reported that the Permit Review Committee met to review the project. The proposed site plan generally avoids many natural resource impacts. However, the project will have impacts on prime agricultural soils, although the impacts are primarily not permanent. Due to the site, aesthetic impacts are mostly localized to the surrounding neighborhood. Screening is proposed primarily along Barker Road. The Board indicated that maintenance (e.g. mowing grass) and decommissioning be considered as permit conditions.
- c. The Board had previously approved submitting a motion to intervene. They still support that as a way to address the issues discussed during this meeting. Jason Rasmussen noted that staff will likely prepare a draft submission for their review as it relates to aesthetics, agricultural soils, decommissioning or other issues.

6. Draft Municipal Infrastructure Needs

- a. Jason Rasmussen reported that our contract with the Department of Housing and Community Development includes a task involving municipal infrastructure needs for community centers. A draft summary of the needs in the region was included in the packet, which was reviewed during the meeting. It recognizes the general needs of all communities for maintaining municipal infrastructure and identifies three notable issues for village center areas. The Board agreed that this appeared to be a good summary. The Board suggested that staff add a bullet regarding need for financial assistance to extend water and sewer infrastructure to residential areas that are adjacent to village centers and presently served by on-site water wells and septic systems.

7. Legislative Update

- a. The Energy Bill ([S.230](#)) includes provisions to improve the effect that regional plans and town plans may have on Section 248 projects under review by the Public Service Board. Under this bill, plans would need to get a lot more detailed regarding energy siting. Regional Plans would require certification by the Department of Public Service to make sure it meets all of the legislative requirements. Under S.230, RPCs would certify town plans. It appears that each RPC will get \$30,000 to help pay for the necessary plan improvements.

Walter Martone cited the recent VLCT Legislative Report that indicated that S.230 includes that town plans “shall” be consistent with the State planning goals in 24 V.S.A. § 4302. The report indicates that “a plan that [is] not consistent with every goal would not be approved by the regional commission, would have no standing in Act 250 or Section 248, would be ineligible for municipal planning grants, and would be lower on priority lists for other state grant or loan programs”. Concern was expressed over the ramifications of this.

- b. The bill formerly known as the Council of Governments (COG) bill, has been modified to eliminate the COG provision. However, [H.249](#) allows for an easier mechanism for towns to enter into inter-municipal service agreements. The bill enables RPCs to facilitate such inter-municipal service agreements. This is enabling legislation, but entering into such agreements is voluntary.

8. ECO AmeriCorps

- a. Dan Potter indicated that the RPC currently is hosting an ECO AmeriCorps volunteer, who is also working with the Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWC) and the Ottauquechee Natural Resource Conservation District (ONRCD). This year, the associated costs are shared between the ONRCD and CRWC.
- b. Dan reported that we have applied to host an ECO AmeriCorps volunteer again next year. This would involve a cost of \$6,500, split between the three organizations for next year. This position involves assistance with water quality-related work.

9. Connecticut River Joint Commissions (CRJC) Update on FERC Relicensing

- a. Jason Rasmussen, as the SWCRPC’s representative on the CRJC, reported on current efforts regarding the FERC relicensing process. The three hydropower dams along the southern VT-NH portion of the Connecticut River (i.e. Wilder, Bellows Falls, Vernon) require renewal of their license from Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).
- b. Areas of primary concern include erosion, aquatic habitat and recreation. Due to the complexities involved, CRJC is coordinating with other partners, including the Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWC).
- c. Representatives from CRJC and CRWC are meeting with the Governors to ask for help and coordination. Of particular interest is getting their assistance to create a Mitigation and Enhancement Fund. A similar coordinated effort about a decade ago culminated in the power company providing about \$15 million for a Mitigation and Enhancement Fund for the northern part of the river. It has

financed many great projects. The two organizations hope to create a similar funding program for the southern portion of the river with help from both States. The meeting with Governor Shumlin went well. The organizations are trying to schedule a meeting with Governor Hassan soon.

- d. Also of interest is the recent announcement that Trans Canada is planning to sell all hydropower facilities in New England.

10. New Business

- a. None

11. Old Business

- a. Creating a Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) will be added to the agenda for next month. Carol Lighthall suggested getting business representation on the CWAC.

12. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:10 PM.