Windham Regional Commission
Community Development Committee
Meeting Minutes: June 13, 2019
Location: WRC Conference Room

Members Present: Tim Arsenault, Chair; Stephen Dotson, Joel Bluming, Bonnie North, Roger Turner
Robert McBride

Absent: Gretchen Havreluk, Edie Mas, Laura Sibilia, Lynn Barrett

Staff present: Susan Westa

Meeting convened at 5:35 PM. Everyone introduced themselves.

Community Development Committee (CDC) Discussion: What in your community or interest area needs to be stronger and how can the CDC help? Bonnie North began by discussing nuisance and blight issues in Bellows Falls. The Planning Commission developed a proposed ordinance after reaching out to the community. They hope to incentivize voluntary compliance. They’re not sure how to deal with property owners who can’t really afford it. They’re hoping to create a fund to help folks out.

Stephen Dotson discussed the important of housing issues region-wide. He suggested taking advantage of in-town infill lots, especially where there is infrastructure and figuring out how to build smaller houses (but not tiny houses).

Roger Turner is concerned about housing and broadband access. He discussed our aging population and said there are limited opportunities to age in place or for cooperative living.

Joel Bluming is concerned about water infrastructure issues in Jamaica, as well as governance and housing. He’s not sure what their options are for building affordable housing because WWHT is not interested in villages, only larger downtowns. He also suggested VT needs to think about other ways to encourage people to come here.

Tim Arsenault said that Vernon residents are concerned about their property taxes increasing. Their taxes have gone up 30% since 2016 and people are scared. They are waiting for the Yankee site to be cleaned up before they can market it for industrial use or to an electric operator.

Broadband Discussion — Laura Sibilia sent a summary of an omnibus telecommunication bill that the governor will sign next week. Joel suggested that WRC reach out to Selectboards to help spread the word. Susan is meeting with Laura next week and will ask how we can help spread the word. Bonnie suggested online platforms and Tim suggested TV (he could interview Laura). Joel suggested that
broadband creates entrepreneurial opportunities and asked if anyone was working on this. Susan said that BDCC may be.

There was also discussion about the major lack of trust many people have with their towns. Joel thinks that WRC should speak with Selectboards. Bonnie suggested we go right to the people with issues and look for “out of the box” solutions. Tim said we should continue this discussion, especially with the upcoming Regional Plan Update.

Minutes: Minutes of April 11th, 2019 were approved on a motion by Stephen, seconded by Joel, by a unanimous vote. Roger abstained since he was absent.

Updates by Topic Areas:

- **Brownfields** – Susan provided an update on the Brownfields program. She shared information about the new $300,000 EPA Hazardous Assessment grant. The Steering Committee approved a grant/loan for NEYT. There is ongoing testing work with multiple projects. Susan is also expecting a couple of RLF applications that she has been helping property owners with.

- **Housing** – Elizabeth Bridgewater from Windham Windsor Housing Trust will be speaking at WRC’s Full Commission Meeting on June 25, 2019 at the Newbrook Fire Dept. in Newfane. Susan is also meeting with Wilmington/Dover next week as they kick off their joint housing study.

- **Cultural and Historic** – Susan noted that last week she attended the VT Downtown Conference and the Creative Community Exchange. The theme of CCX was inclusion and she will share what she learned with WRC staff.

- **Infrastructure** – Chris pulled together a meeting with FRCOG and Brattleboro about the expanded rail service to Greenfield and how Brattleboro can build off of that.

- **Recreation** – Stephen shared information about the Brattleboro regional trail discussion and potential grant applications. The Retreat Farm is hosting a meeting with the National Parks Service about the assistance that they can provide. Bonnie discussed Bellows Falls trail opportunities and the grant the BFHS received to clear a trail.

- **Economic/Community Development** – Several committee members had attended the SoVT Economy Summit and agreed that the keynote speaker, Joe Minicozzi, was great and had an important message about value of different forms of development.

  The CEDS priorities were announced at the summit and two of the top six were WRC projects:
  - Extending Rail from MA
  - Village Water & Wastewater Needs Assessment & Feasibility Plan

Sibling Region Subcommittee: Stephen said that the committee will be working on their Purpose & Objectives Statement at their meeting next week.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be July 11th at 5:30 PM. The group discussed potential topics, which included:
• USDA Rural Development funding
• Drinking Water
• Rich Earth Institute technical discussion
• Welcoming a diverse population to VT – Stephen has a friend who is a minister in Holyoke. He will talk to her about suggestions/ideas.
• Tim suggested that some of these topics might be joint meetings with the Natural Resources Committee.

There was a motion to adjourn by Roger, seconded by Stephen and approved by all at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Susan Westa, Senior Planner