

**Mad River Valley Planning District
Steering Committee
December 15, 2016**

Present were:

Fayston: Jared Cadwell, Selectboard; Carol Chamberlin, Planning Commission

Waitsfield: Kari Dolan, Selectboard

Warren: Bob Ackland, Selectboard; Jim Sanford, Planning Commission

Sugarbush: Adam Greshin

CVRPC: Bonnie Waninger

MRV Chamber of Commerce: Peter MacLaren

MRVPD: Joshua Schwartz; Kristine Keeney

Guests: Chris Keating, Valley Reporter; Mike Brouillette, VT Center for Geographic Information

The meeting opened at 7:10pm. Bob Ackland, Chair, brought the meeting to order. There was not a quorum present at the beginning of the meeting, so the acceptance of the previous meeting's minutes were postponed until a representative from Waitsfield was present.

I. New Business

a. Presentation on VT Mapping Resources for Planning

- i. Mike Brouillett's presentation focused on new LiDAR (light distance and ranging technology) for portions of Vermont in much higher quality than has been previously available with 1' contours and 3' horizontal accuracy.
- ii. LiDAR technology involves a plane that flies over an area and sends down pulses of light and uses the returns to deduce height of features, hillshade, aspect, slope, and building footprints among other things.
- iii. LiDAR allows users to see things that you cannot through orthoimagery due to forest or ground cover and quantify changes over time in the landscape.
- iv. Uses for LiDAR include:
 1. Flood risk management
 2. Energy generation potential
 3. Erosion management
 4. Forest planning and management
 5. Forest fire management
 6. Evaluating changes in river corridors
 7. Infrastructure planning & management (roads, bridges, culverts)
 8. Archeology
- v. Mike stated that more accurate LiDAR data means better decision making for policy makers.
- vi. He explained that new data for Washington County is pending delivery right now and will likely be available next year.
- vii. There are several VCGI Data Dissemination Options:
 1. External hard drive product
 2. Direct download
 3. Map Services
 4. Image services
 5. VT Interactive Map Viewer

- viii. VCGI is working with VTrans on a parcel program to join grand lists with parcel line data over the next few years.
 - 1. Joshua Schwartz asked if LiDAR can help determine property lines? Mike said it can help detect stone walls and use it to inform and property surveys.
- ix. Kari pointed out that LiDAR is especially helpful in a state like Vermont that has 70% forest cover and that it has additional uses including:
 - 1. Informing a potential future restudy of the Mad River if FEMA decides to undertake that effort.
 - 2. Determine stormwater discharges that are causing erosion on the landscape and use that data to prioritize stabilization efforts and prevent damage on private property.
 - 3. Identify abandoned logging roads and help landowners stabilize them or use the roads for other purposes.

b. Accept Meeting Minutes of 11/10/16 Steering Committee Meeting: Once Kari Dolan was in attendance, Jared Cadwell moved to accept the minutes of the previous Steering Committee meeting. Carol seconded and all voted in favor.

c. MRV Energy Planning Discussion

- i. Joshua Schwartz explained that Act 174 created energy planning goals and Public Service Board (PSB) guidelines created thresholds that communities need to incorporate into their town plans if they are going to have standing in PSB siting decisions. He went on to state that energy planning was previously removed from the MRVPD's Work Plan and Steve Shea, Waitsfield Planning Commission, requested it to be reconsidered.
- ii. Joshua Schwartz and representatives from Waitsfield and Fayston also attended on CVRPC training on 12/14 to learn more about the process and for the MRV towns to be considered for energy planning funding.
- iii. Bob Ackland asked Jared if VLCT had made any progress on the state level in changing requirements for communities on energy planning? Jared Cadwell explained that VLCT is having an on-going conversation with the legislature and PSB about Act 174.
- iv. Bonnie Waninger went on to give an overview of the process and CVRPC's approach to meeting Act 174 requirements.
 - 1. She said that the new PSB guidelines could be overwhelming when you first read them, but they are fluid. And that the regional planning commissions are trying to fill in the pieces that are not explicit.
 - 2. She explained that the data CVRPC is receiving is really going to provide an idea of order of magnitude; it is going to give the region and municipalities energy generation and consumption estimates based on census data. Then the data can be used to identify order of magnitude- do we need to work towards converting 3 homes or 300 homes from one to another type of energy.
 - 3. She explained that she does not think the process was as top down as it appears because people were asking for it, the legislature created goals, and the PSB determined if we could meet these goals. Now the question is are we willing to make these change on the local level?
 - 4. She challenged the Committee to think if municipal energy and transportation goals work together in their town plans?
 - 5. She said the process starts with data analysis; VEIC put together data and some options to reach the regional energy goals in the Comprehensive Energy Plan. CVRPC is going to break the data down by town to identify where the resources are including solar, wind, biomass, hydro, etc.

6. She explained that CVRPC is also looking at what constrains there might be on the local level to energy generation. They have broken them down into categories; Level 1 constraints (won't get a permit to site), Level 2 potential constraints (it's going to be difficult to get through the permit process to site), and Level 3 (where it is the easiest to site). If an area falls into a Level 3 constraint, towns will need to provide a rationale (more than just community sentiment) like a previous study or zoning bylaws.
 - a. For example, if there are development limits in a town's zoning bylaws it could preclude wind development above a certain elevation. However, if a town says no energy generation above a certain elevation, then they also have to agree to no other kinds of development in that area.
7. She asked the PSB directly if multiple towns could do energy planning together, and they said publically that communities could plan together but adopt plans individually. So it does not appear that anything would stop the three MRV communities from doing planning and outreach together.
8. She explained that CVRPC is looking at regional energy goals from proportional share of generation (i.e. how much solar potential is there in Washington County) perspective and calculating projections of future energy use.
9. She thinks that the generation piece has to be a regional conversation because some communities have solar and some have wind potential. She understands that local conversations are going to be tough. She explained that the mapping and data from CVRPC should help communities talk about energy goals.
10. She explained that local communities must express interest by Dec. 19th in funding for energy planning.
- v. Kari Dolan stated that Waitsfield has been working for years to protect the Northfield Ridge from wind development by including language in the town plan and trying to create recreational opportunities in these areas. She asked Bonnie how do we reconcile the years of work that has gone into preserving assets that are important to Waitsfield?
 1. Bonnie Waninger said that she gets asked by communities if they don't want wind, can they just do more solar? She explained that there is a calculation for x amount of wind = x amount of solar. She said that solar becomes much less palatable once you realize what the conversion factor means.
 2. CVRPC is actively looking for communities that are open to wind and potentially working on a swapping program. She said there does not appear to be language in the guidelines that preclude this approach.
- vi. Bob Ackland asked if Waitsfield and Warren are going to be updating their town plans, what is their capacity to also do energy planning?
 1. Jim Sanford replied that Warren has been working for three years on energy planning and that it would be difficult to revisit it at this time. He also stated that Fayston's energy section was not impacted by the Act 174 conversation the last time they did their plan, but they knew it was going to be a focus going forward.
 2. Bonnie Waninger suggested looking at how close existing Town Plan energy chapters are to meeting the new PSB guidelines.
- vii. Adam Greshin expressed that he thought Act 174 was more top down than Bonnie Waninger was giving credit for. He said that the Legislature responded to the Governor's priority for a comprehensive energy policy to be enforced by his appointees at the PSB. He said it was a party-line vote and when people understand the practical implications of this it might not be broadly accepted. He said that the Valley has one of the higher "planning IQs" and if these new rules give our community pause, then other communities are not going to have a good idea as how to handle them.

- viii. Josh Schwartz pointed out that communities are not being forced to do energy planning. Adam Greshin agreed but reiterated that if communities want standing at the PSB for siting decisions, then they need to do the planning.
- ix. Bob Ackland said that it is not possible for Warren to give CVRPC an answer by 12/19 because there is not a selectboard meeting between now and then, and the Planning Commission does not meet until 1/9.
- x. Josh Schwartz pointed out that communities are not required to meet the higher test laid out in Act 174; he said the MRVPD could participate at the regional level and then learn lessons from the initial process.
- xi. Bonnie Waninger also wanted to highlight the fact that the energy planning process is not just about putting up “red flags” about types of energy that towns do not want, but it can help put up “green flags” about types of energy that communities do want.

II. Old Business

- a. FY18 Work Plan & Budget
 - i. Joshua Schwartz explained that staff revised the FY18 Work Plan based on the effort vs. impact exercise that the Committee completed at the previous meeting and boiled it down into hours per category and task. He also highlighted the fact that there was only 10 hours dedicated for energy planning.
 - 1. The Committee went on to try and identify which items could be cut to free up additional time for energy planning.
 - 2. Jared Cadwell asked Kari Dolan if the MRVPD needs to spend 150 hours on the Waitsfield West Sidewalk project? Kari said that the project is moving forward and they expect to break ground next year. She said they currently have a Project Manager but still expect to need additional support from the Planning District.
 - 3. Bob Ackland suggested making a 4% cut in every task in order to make time for energy planning.
 - 4. Peter MacLaren asked if 120 hours was the right amount of hours to dedicate to energy planning?
 - 5. Kristine Keeney suggested that if the Committee wanted staff to dedicate a substantial amount of time to energy planning that we would try to revise the FY18 Work Plan again to fit it in.
- b. MRV Leadership Meeting Follow-up
 - i. Bob Ackland suggested that at the next Leadership Meeting there are only three or four total presentations.
 - ii. Jim Sanford expressed his feeling that all of the topics of the presentations were important but they should be tightened up and each presentation should be no longer than 20 minutes.
 - iii. There was a suggestion that next time, Bob Ackland should lay down some ground rules for comments or questions from the audience and enforce the presentation time limits.
- c. Community Vitality Project Update
 - i. Bob Ackland explained that the CVP has split into three groups and a communications team. They are working on action plans and are determining if there will be an “ask” for any money. He mentioned the possibility of using the MRVPD’s available surplus for a proposal one of the groups is putting together.
 - ii. There was a substantial discussion about the MRVPD’s \$20,000 surplus that will be available at the end of the FY18 budget. Jim Sanford expressed the fact that he thought the MRPV D was going to use the surplus to do a Recreation Plan. Bob explained that the Committee had recommended recreation planning for surplus but the MRV Recreation District did not want to engage in that process.

- iii. Kari Dolan asked if there was an option to use the surplus as a credit toward the FY18 contributions of the towns and Sugarbush.
 - iv. Bob Ackland stated that the Committee had voted on asking for level funding and retaining the surplus at the previous Steering Committee meeting. He said that he was unsure of the process for potentially reversing that vote.
- d. IMPLAN
- i. Bob Ackland explained that the MRVPD purchased IMPLAN software for a subscription for data that covers Washington County for \$1,200 that was already in the current budget for economic development.
 - ii. Bob Ackland went on to provide examples of how IMPLAN can be used. He suggested that if Sugarbush wanted to build a new hotel or someone wanted to host a beer festival, you could put in the monetary value of hotel or the beer festival and the software will model how many jobs would be created and taxes would be generated among other outputs. He said that it is basically an input/output model of economic activity.
 - iii. Kari Dolan suggested that the MRVPD potentially do economic modeling for the new Lawson's Brewery, an enhanced trail network, new sidewalk, recreation fields to figure out what the towns will get for their public investments.
 - iv. Kari Dolan stressed that the MRVPD should inform the selectboards that we now have this capability and what modeling might be helpful to them to inform the decision making processes on upcoming projects.

III. Executive Director's Highlights of Staff Report: J. Schwartz provided the Committee updates on several areas including flood resilience/water quality, transportation, and the MRVPD collaboration with Middlebury College.

- a. Ridge to River Flood Resilience event was held on 12/7 and was very well attended. Joshua Schwartz and Jim Sanford both thought that the event was successful and great conversations happened amongst the attendees.
- b. Kristine Keeney provided an update on the on-going efforts to increase ridership on the Mad Bus by working closely with GMT and the Chamber of Commerce on outreach efforts. The MRVPD is focusing on the Valley Floor route, while GMT is focusing on getting the word out about the Snowcap Commuter that runs from Montpelier to the Valley. There are new materials, updated websites, new bus stops, additional marketing efforts, and the MRVPD and Chamber are working together on a rewards card for riders and a "moving mixer" on the bus.
 - i. Adam Greshin pointed out that one of the reasons that the Snowcap Commuter used to be highly utilized was the promotion of the route in Montpelier High School. Joshua Schwartz explained that GMT has been trying to work with the school but there have been many roadblocks along the way.
 - ii. Kristine Keeney and Joshua Schwartz stressed to the group to do whatever they can to promote the bus in their towns because if we do not increase ridership on the Valley Floor and Snowcap Commuter routes, they will be eliminated next season.
- c. Joshua Schwartz announced that the final MRV Active Transportation Plan will be available early next week and that he will be sending it out to the Committee and the broader public.
- d. Joshua Schwartz also announced to the Committee that the Mad River Path Association is searching for a new part-time executive director and to pass along the position to anyone they may know that would be interested.
- e. Joshua Schwartz also announced that the MRVPD has received the final reports and documents from the projects that Middlebury College students had been working on this semester. Jared Cadwell asked if the deliverables were of good quality? Bob Ackland said that he was mostly satisfied with the results, but that he wished we had been a bit more involved in the projects as they evolved throughout the semester. He stressed that he believes this is just the beginning of a

productive relationship between the MRVPD and Middlebury College, and that the MRVPD should have solid methodologies that it can build on for future analyses. Peter Nelson, one of the professors at Middlebury College, has been discussing the idea of bringing an international geography conference to the MRV in 2019.

IV. Sugarbush Season Update

- a. Adam Greshin provided an update on Sugarbush's skier visits, snow, and operations. He highlighted the fact that skier visits are up 75%, paid days are three times ahead of last year, advance bookings are where they want them to be, and the mountain has already received over 100" of snow! There is some concern about water levels for snowmaking; there should be some additional rain and melting this weekend that will hopefully refill the rivers and ponds.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristine Keeney