



# *Bennington County Regional Commission*

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May 1, 2010

Dear Bennington Region Legislators,

The BCRC together with its counterparts in regional planning and economic development have worked constructively in the 'Challenges for Change' process. It appears that proponents of deconstruct/reconstruct model are gaining ground per the points made below. While change, efficiencies, and coordinated delivery are surely in order, I urge you build on the strength of the existing building blocks.

It is unfortunate that our own mother agency of Commerce and Community Development is insistent on a new structure casting aside local control and relationships, and indeed the regional planning program as we know it. I know you have been supportive of us as I believe our work speaks for itself. However, the bill under consideration in the Senate Economic Development Committee as of 4/30 does the following:

- Replaces the transparent and equitable funding formula currently in place with a process where the Agency of Commerce Secretary has unchecked discretion;
- Gives full authority to the Secretary to implement forced mergers and consolidations. The Agency has told the Senate Economic Development Committee they will use this authority to force REC/RPC mergers and eliminate at least two regions regardless of local support for a change; and
- Cuts regional funding by 15% (on top of 13% cut last year).

The Bill as proposed:

- Undermines the regional planning commission system despite the fact that no evaluation has shown that this will produce better outcomes or cost savings;
- Disregards strong evidence about the effectiveness of RPC's and their responsiveness to the needs of local communities;
- Conflicts with the clear documentation that there is no duplication among the regional organizations;
- Requires competition between and among regions instead of supporting cooperation for serving statewide needs. The RPC's have a strong track record of such cooperative efforts, to the benefit of local, state and federal programs; and
- Replaces regional responsiveness to local needs with concentrated power in statue bureaucracy.

*The above measures represent a taking of authority from towns regarding who controls regional planning commissions, and what RPC's do. Moreover, our function as a bridge between state and local government will become a bridge to nowhere if legislation under consideration prevails. Hardly a constructive process when challenges call for a united front.*

RPC's have responded to the Challenges for Change. A brief summary of our proposal is attached, and it includes:

- Outcomes, Measures and Accountability: RPCs want to be held accountable for successful work
- System Changes: Including coordination of programs and co-location with RDC's within two years
- Savings: Increased coordination of administration and programs with and across regions

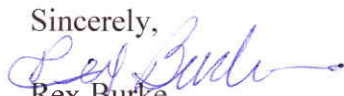
RPC's bring value to Vermont in several important ways:

- Close to member towns providing local and regional services and programs and serve as a bridge between local, state and federal agencies
- Deliver statutory responsibilities and programs in such areas as emergency management, solid waste, energy, brownfields and economic development support functions
- Maximize the recovery of federal dollars for our communities, regions, and state in support of the economy and environment

Clearly budget cuts are needed, and we accept that. And, we can improve the delivery of services the C 4 C promotes. ***But we also know that towns must retain control over local and regional planning and their own affairs in this regard. It must not be taken away or diluted.***

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

  
Rex Burke  
Executive Director

## CHALLENGES FOR CHANGE

### REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS

April 27, 2010

- Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions, as political subdivisions of the state, are uniquely structured and situated to fill a role in the absence of county government.
- RPCs are close to local government and serve as a bridge between local, state and federal governments.
- RPCs have federal and state statutory responsibilities in emergency management, transportation, Brownfields, energy, and economic development.
- RPCs maximize the recovery of federal dollars for our economy, our environment and our communities.

The Regional Planning Commissions have embraced the challenge to serve Vermont in a more effective way. The proposal that we have submitted improves accountability; identifies and reaches measurable outcomes; commits to system redesign; and accepts these improvements while absorbing a total reduction in state dollars of almost 23% from FY 09 levels. These immediate measures, coupled with continued research and system redesign in the short-term will produce a stronger system for Vermont for decades to come.

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Outcomes, Measures and Accountability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Specific outcomes and measures included in contracts</li><li>✓ Performance evaluations by local and state interests</li></ul>                                                                                       |
| System Changes                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Single regional contract agent</li><li>✓ Single consolidated regional work program</li><li>✓ Aggressive co-location schedule</li><li>✓ Regional services recommendations due by 9/25</li></ul>                      |
| Savings                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Immediate 10% savings through administrative and program coordination</li><li>✓ In addition to previous 13% cut in RPCs and 50% cut to municipal planning</li><li>✓ Additional savings identified by 9/25</li></ul> |

## Appendix A

### Leveraging ACCD dollars

State funding to regional planning commissions from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) is used to complete our statutory duties. It is also used to match federal funds that RPCs obtain directly from Washington to further the needs of the state and our communities.

In FY 09, regional planning commissions leveraged ACCD funding in the following way:

| <u>Regional Planning Commission</u> | <u>ACCD match</u>   | <u>Federal dollars</u> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Addison County RPC                  | \$ 63,000           | \$ 420,000             |
| Bennington RPC                      | 40,000              | 655,000                |
| Central VT RPC                      | 44,000              | 345,000                |
| Chittenden RPC                      | 233,000             | 1,308,000              |
| Lamoille County PC                  | 63,500              | 461,000                |
| NVDA                                | 36,000              | 356,000                |
| Northwest RPC                       | 175,500             | 1,744,500              |
| Rutland RPC                         | 69,000              | 900,500                |
| Southern Windsor RPC                | 70,500              | 1,057,000              |
| TRORC                               | 103,625             | 640,000                |
| Windham RC                          | <u>130,700</u>      | <u>795,000</u>         |
| <b>Totals</b>                       | <b>\$ 1,028,825</b> | <b>\$ 8,682,000</b>    |

In FY 10, Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions received \$1,700,000 in energy efficiency monies and recently the EPA awarded \$2,500,000 for Brownfields assessments and clean-ups; bringing the total to \$12,882,000 that was leveraged by the Regional Planning Commissions using Agency of Commerce and Community Development funding.

As political subdivisions of the State of Vermont, we are uniquely positioned and structured under Vermont law to maximize the recovery of federal dollars for our economy, our environment and our communities.