Program:

Introduction to the Windham Region Broadband Project: Executive Director Chris Campany introduced the project team, which includes WRC Senior Planner Sue Westa, Carole Monroe with Valley Net, and Alex Kelley with the Center on Rural Innovations. Together the team presented the project which involves the development of a feasibility study to serve via fiber optic technology residences and businesses in the Windham Region that currently do not have high speed broadband, which, if approved, will be followed by the development of a business plan. This project is made possible by a Broadband Innovation Grant from the Department of Public Service. The contract was signed on January 6th and the project must be completed within six months. The WRC’s role is to serve as project manager, convener of towns and other broadband stakeholders, and to provide
support to towns as they survey residents about broadband needs. Valley Net and Center on Rural Innovation are the technical experts and will be developing the feasibility study and business plan. This project is modeled after the successful Communications Union District (CUD) business model established by EC Fiber. Per state law, municipalities may not tax or take on debt associated with broadband telecommunications, but they may form CUDs which can bond and bear the risk. One of the key products of this project is the identification of which CUDs make geographic, economic and technological sense. Towns are being asked to adopt a simple resolution stating that they will participate in the project and to appoint a primary point of contact for this project. This is not intended to limit who may participate in the effort, but rather to identify who has been authorized by each town’s Selectboard to be the official point of contact. It was explained that wherever towns are in deliberating upon the formation of a CUD is fine; that more will be known once this project is complete. The key responsibility for participating towns is to develop a strategy to disseminate and get back resident responses to a broadband needs survey. A workshop will be held on February 6th from 6-8 p.m. at Newbrook Fire Department that will focus on the survey and strategies to maximize participation. It was noted that this project is being informed by the EC Fiber project whose coverage area is similar in both geography and demographics to the Windham Region. A kickoff meeting for this project was held on January 16th. All materials from that meeting, including the presentation that was made during the meeting on the 16th and this meeting, are available on the WRC website homepage. A video of the kickoff meeting is also available.

**Administrative Items:**

**Approval of October 27, 2019 Meeting Minutes:** On a motion by Commissioner Snelling, seconded by Commissioner Burnell, the minutes were approved with 2 abstentions.

**Approval of Treasurer’s Report:** Secretary-Treasurer Kilburn reported that the FY2018 audit was complete, that the FY2019 indirect cost rate proposal has been approved, and that the FY2019 audit is getting underway and should be complete within 6 months of September 30, 2019, which is the end of the fiscal year. She explained that the Finance Committee would be meeting monthly, and that updated accounting procedures would be brought to the Full Commission for a vote at its March meeting. Treasurer Kilburn and Chair Ciuffreda explained that the Executive Board had proposed that going forward the Full Commission would be provided with a budget narrative and that financial reports would be available for those who wanted to see them. Concerns were raised by two Commissioners that they felt it was appropriate and necessary for financial reports to be provided to each Commissioner at Full Commission meetings. There was general agreement that this should be the procedure going forward. Treasurer Kilburn invited any interested Commissioners to attend the next Finance Committee meeting, which will be held on Wednesday, February 5th at 8 a.m. in the WRC conference room. Commissioner Snelling suggested the financial reports should be available on the WRC website. On a motion by Commissioner Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner Whitman, the Treasurer’s Report was approved.

**Update on Sibling Region Subcommittee Work & Approval of Letter of Introduction:** Commissioner Stephan Dotson, Chair of the Sibling Region Subcommittee, explained the sibling region concept and
that discussions had been going on with the Skone region of Sweden about a possible sibling region relationship similar to that of sister cities. The idea is to create an opportunity for an exchange of ideas between two regions that are similar in geography, demography and economics. Members of the subcommittee plan to travel to Sweden at their own cost to meet with representatives there. They’d like to take a letter of introduction with them, and this letter was presented to the Full Commission. On a motion by Commissioner van Loon, seconded by Commissioner Bluming, the letter was approved with one dissenting vote.

**Vote on Citizen Interest Commissioner for Healthy Communities:** Chair Ciuffreda explained that Prudence MacKinney had resigned as Citizen Interest Commissioner for Healthy Communities as she had retired from her position as Brattleboro District Director of Public Health Services. She recommended that her successor, Laura Overton, be appointed to the position and this was endorsed by the Executive Board. A brief biography was read. On a motion by Commissioner Dotson, seconded by Commissioner Turner, Laura Overton was elected to serve as Citizen Interest Commissioner for Healthy Communities.

**Proposed Regional Plan Update Approach and Schedule for 2020-21:** Executive Director Campany explained that the original process proposed in 2018 for a regional plan update had been derailed by significant staffing changes and changing demands for staff and Commission time. The current regional plan expires in September, 2022. He proposed that over the next 15 months the Commission focus on a minor update to create the time and space for a major plan update. The minor update would focus on what the Commission feels are necessary changes to policy language, updates to maps and data, and better integration of the Regional Transportation Plan and the Regional Energy Plan into the Regional Plan itself. The major update, which can begin during the minor plan update, would examine the question, when growth comes, where will it go? To that end the major update would explore the policy and implementation strategies necessary to achieve the compact settlement patterns called for by the plan, how to improve the resiliency, especially flood resilience, of these settlements in the face of climate change and global warming, and what is necessary to maintain and improve forest and habitat continuity. Commissioner Whitman expressed his concern and displeasure that progress had not been made on updating of plan maps during the past year. It was noted that this would begin in February and March under the proposed plan update schedule. There was agreement among those in attendance that this plan update and approach made sense.

**Executive Director’s Report:** Executive Director Campany noted that the Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel (NDCAP) was in the process of discussing what if any changes needed to be made to the Panel’s enabling legislation. He explained that key issues include who should be most responsible for bearing the costs of supporting the panel, NorthStar or the state, as well as Panel composition and whether or not those entities to be advised should be able to vote on what they are to be advised about. He also advised Commissioners that as committees deliberate on possible changes to Act 250, that they focus on the broader issues such as the merits of keeping or dispensing with the District Environmental Commissions rather than specific details until it is clear what elements of proposed legislation seem to be gaining traction and which will be dropped. This is
necessary because WRC staff have limited time to track any bill that goes forward and will need general guidance to inform comment and testimony. Commissioner Whitman raised concerns about proposed elevation levels that would trigger Act 250 jurisdiction.

**Chair’s Report:** None.

**Public Comment:** None was offered.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:10 p.m. on a motion by Commissioner Bluming.

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Collins