
Citizen Interest Commissioners Present:


Staff Present: Chris Campany, Kendall Gifford, Ashley Collins

Introductions: There was a quorum of 18 towns present.

Convened: 7:34pm

Administrative Items & Reports:

Secretary’s Report: On a motion by Jodi French, seconded by John Whitman the minutes from the March meeting were approved.

Financial Report: On a motion by Jodi French, seconded by all present the finance report was approved.

Rockingham Town Plan Approval: On a motion to ratify the approval of the Rockingham Town Plan as presented, and the Town Plan and Process from the March Full Commission Meeting, was moved by John Whitman, seconded by Brad Horn; the motion was approved.

Healthy Communities Coalition (HCC): The HCC was invited to speak about their mission and how it might be able to assist with town and regional plans. It is comprised of 12 people who are working to help create environmental and physical healthy lifestyle changes within the workplace and communities. They HCC received a grant in 2009 for training on environmental policy changes. Four members were present to discuss ways of improving and maintaining healthier lifestyles, the relationship between the built environment and
lifestyle, and how they might be able to engage in the municipal planning process. They identified four ways they could help:

- Engage communities to promote healthy behavior and eating habits;
- Work with towns in the region as they re-write town plans to help consider incorporating priorities to promote healthy living;
- Build comprehensive farm to school programs county-wide; using more local fresh foods; and
- Support efforts to improve environmental policies for healthy eating and activity.

Sadie Fischesser is a member of the HCC and on the Town Plan Advisory Group for the Town of Brattleboro. A goal is to include healthy lifestyle choices in each chapter of the plan. Tristam Johnson, a member of HCC and the Newfane Planning Commission, discussed a community health index as a tool that allows the community to build systems for healthy living. Steve Fortier, a member of HCC and director of Meeting Waters YMCA highlighted walkability and ridability audits, and food related assessments. Using funds from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), they can assist with audits at no cost to the community.

**Sovernet FiberConnect Project:** Gregg Noble, Business Development Manager with Sovernet, was present to discuss the Vermont FiberConnect project, a public-private partnership between the Vermont Telecommunications Authority (VTA) and Sovernet Communications. It will allow Sovernet to develop, own, maintain, and operate a 773 mile fiber-optic “middle mile network” in seven Vermont counties, including the Windham Region, with connections to “community anchor institutions” such as K-12 schools, libraries, colleges, state government offices, and public safety communications networks. Windham County will benefit from approximately 190 miles of fiber optic line. These institutions will not be automatically connected to the network; connection is by choice. The decision by schools to connect, or not connect, is particularly important. Each school must make the decision whether to commit to the project by May 1st (the deadline has since been extended to June 1st). The reason for the deadline is that Sovernet needs to finalize their implementation plan. In some towns, if the schools opt not to participate, the network will not be extended into the town. Gregg discussed the benefits of the fiber optic connections, comparing the speed and capacity of the network to the difference between a town dirt road and a 10-lane superhighway. Schools will be able to interconnect with one another throughout the network and beyond at such speed that face to face communication should be virtually seamless. The same will be true for residential and commercial consumers if last mile providers (those who provide service directly to homes and businesses) tap into the network to sell service. Cost seems to be a major barrier for schools within the region, and is the main reason all schools have not yet committed to the project. Bill Colvin, the bi-town economic development specialist for Wilmington and Dover, explained that towns can contribute funds to schools if they use the schools for purposes other than education (i.e., emergency shelter, recreation, etc.). He also mentioned that a few areas within the region will not be able to receive the fiber from Sovernet; Grafton, Athens and part of Rockingham are
currently VTel territory. Chris was asked to reach out to the towns and schools to encourage them to discuss with one another the merits of the service, the potential benefits to the town, and what funding agreements might be possible. He was also asked how the broadband planning project being supported by a grant through VTA related to the Sovernet project and others. He explained that the VTA-supported project was primarily focused on the development of a regional broadband adoption strategy that, together with strategies produced by the other 10 regional planning commissions (RPCs), would inform a statewide strategy. The WRC’s work on this effort is largely prescribed by VTA in consultation with all 11 RPCs, and outreach related to specific service provider initiatives was not supported by the grant. However, the development of an adoption strategy is important because provision of high-speed internet/broadband is dependent upon demand. If the public doesn’t demand faster service, there will not be incentive for providers to make direct to home or business connections. The purpose of the broadband adoption strategy is to inform consumers how high-speed broadband can be used, thereby creating demand, which can then be translated into service.

**Executive Director’s Report & Other Business:**

1) Chris has been asked to testify before the Vermont State Nuclear Advisory Panel on April 27th about the difference between the SAFSTOR and DECON nuclear plant decommissioning strategies. He will present findings and positions developed by the WRC.

2) The Executive Board will begin discussion of the Regional Plan update strategy at its May meeting.

3) It was explained that the current contract with the state for emergency planning will expire at the end of July, and that FEMA will no longer allow the state to bill for work conducted prior to the execution of the next year’s contract. This means that emergency planning work supported by the state contract will have to cease once the funds are expended or the current contract expires, whichever comes first. Work on all-hazard mitigation plans will continue as the WRC has committed to their completion. Support for the LEPC6 will continue through the LEPC budget. Towns need to get their Basic Operation Plans (BEOPs) into the WRC by the end of May.

4) The Regional Technology/Broadband Planning Team has been created and will meet in May. For more information contact Dinah Reed.

There was a **motion** to adjourn the meeting, seconded by all present.

**Meeting adjourned at 9:05pm**

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Collins