Administrative Items & Reports:

Secretary’s Report: On a motion by G. Brown, seconded by L. Sorenson, the minutes from the November meeting were approved, subject to ratification at the next Commission meeting.

Financial Report: On a motion by L. Sorenson, seconded by J. Whitman, the Finance Report was approved, subject to ratification at the next Commission meeting.

Conway School of Landscape Designs: Jessica Orkin, Rachel Edwards, and Anna Fialkoff, Conway School Graduate Students, were present at the meeting to express their interest in working within the Windham Region on forestry related projects. Their project would raise awareness about the importance of the forest products industry to the Windham Region, and would include case studies on the different aspects of the industry The students are looking for volunteers to participate in the effort.

The Future of Forests and Forestry in the Windham Region: Windham County Forester, Bill Guenther, was present to discuss the importance of the second largest industry in the State of
Vermont: forestry and wood products. He explained that Windham County is the “Timber Capital” of the state. He provided some statistical information on different tree species, ages, populations, and the volume of trees which are on privately owned properties. He mentioned that we will see a population decline in certain species of trees, from the combination of climate change, new record highs in temperature, and other natural variables. Mr. Guenther discussed invasive plants and insects, noting the potential threat Vermont forests face from the Hemlock Wooly Adelgid, Emerald Ash Borer, and the Asian Longhorn Beetle.

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

*Forestry Related Projects:* Chris briefly outlined various forestry related projects that WRC has been working on including a Forest and Parks-funded Forest Stewardship Project, and the Undeveloped Waters and Streams mapping project recently completed by WRC GIS planner, Jeff Nugent. The Forest Stewardship Project will involve work with volunteers in towns to identify and map important forest resources. The goal is for each region to participate in this effort, producing a forest resources index for the state as a whole.

*Regional Plan Update:* Chris noted that the deadline has passed for the first round of comments/feedback regarding the Regional Plan Update. The plan had a high number of views, but relatively few comments on the plan were submitted to the WRC. The Transportation Plan has already started the revision process, and WRC committees are in the process of suggesting revisions to the Regional Plan.

*Transportation Coordination Study:* Chris mentioned that this completed study was funded through the Jeffords Center, and was well received. The study examined how the full range of existing transportation services, including transit, school bus, human services, and private transportation services, could be better coordinated and integrated.

*Broadband Adoption Strategy:* Chris explained that the WRC, along with the other 10 regional planning commissions, developed a regional strategy to increase use and adoption of broadband once it’s more universally available as of the end of December, 2013. Together the regional plans constitute a statewide broadband adoption strategy.

*Economic Development Administration:* WRC applied for an EDA Disaster Recovery Grant in conjunction with the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation and Bennington County Regional Planning Commission. The grant will enable the collaborative to hire under contract specialists to assist individual businesses with recovery and resiliency planning, and municipalities with resiliency planning.

*VT Energy Siting Commission:* Chris summarized WRC’s activity with the VT Energy Siting Commission, explaining that it appears they will recommend a substantial role in energy planning and participation in the Section 248 process.

*Transportation Funding Study Committee:* Chris explained that he participated in the work of the committee, which was established by the legislature to explore the range of revenue options that could help fill the anticipated $240 million annual state transportation budget shortfall anticipated from 2014 through 2018.
Municipal Grant Writing Workshops: Chris mentioned that WRC worked with the Vermont Community Foundation to organize four municipal grant writing workshops around the state. The first was held at Mt. Snow on January 23rd.

Revised State Road Code and Standards: VTrans has released draft revised road codes and standards to be reviewed by the towns, which they can voluntarily adopt or decline. This draft set of codes and standards is partly in response to the experience with FEMA in the wake of Irene, and will affect the percentage reimbursement a town would receive in the event of a disaster.

Proposed WRC Bylaw Amendment: Chris explained that the proposed bylaw changes would add an additional member to the Executive Board and would establish a process by which nominees for WRC offices would come from the Executive Board. The Executive Board approved the amendment during its January meeting. The Full Commission will vote on the amendment during its February meeting.

P. van Loon moved adjournment, seconded by G. Brown.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55PM

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Collins