



# **WORK PROGRAM AND BUDGET**

## **Fiscal Year 2026**

**October 1, 2025 - September 30, 2026**

**The Windham Regional Commission assists towns in southeastern Vermont to provide effective local governance and works collaboratively with them to address regional issues.**

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**WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION**

**FY2026 Work Program and Budget**

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## Introduction

The Windham Regional Commission's (WRC) Work Program is an annual (October 1 through September 30) statement of planned activities and work tasks to further the Commission's mission and program objectives. The Work Program consists of Core Work Elements and Special Projects, some of which have their own detailed work programs, funding, and work agreements.

### What's New?

- The WRC adopted an updated regional plan at its meeting on July 29, 2025 that will take effect September 2, 2025. This was the culmination of a plan update process that began in 2022. During that period the legislature passed Act 181, which enacted reforms to regional and municipal land use planning and Act 250. One of the principal elements of the act was the goal of greater consistency among regional future land use maps, which must be Act 181 compliant by the end of 2026. During this fiscal year the WRC will, in collaboration with towns and with public engagement, update the just-adopted regional plan to be Act 181 compliant.
- Dramatic changes in policy and funding at the federal level have thus far had few direct impacts on the WRC work program and budget, but may be quite consequential in the longer-term. The most direct impacts relate to the elimination of the FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which has been used in Vermont to pay for FEMA-required municipal Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) development and updates, as well as municipal mitigation projects. The WRC is often asked by towns to contract with them to work on their LHMPs, but whether or not a funding stream will be available for that purpose remains to be seen and, if not, whether or not towns would use their own funds. There was also considerable uncertainty as to whether or not FEMA was going to release funds for the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). This grant constitutes a significant portion of the Vermont Emergency Management Agency total budget, and is the source of funding for regional planning commission work on local emergency preparedness. As of this writing FEMA has invited states to apply for these funds after a months-long delay, and the precise allocation for Vermont RPCs has yet to be announced. We are assuming there will be some reduction in funding. In the coming months the impacts of changes in the federal programmatic and funding environment will become more clear, as will the impacts on the overall state budget. While we have prepared a conservative budget for FY2026, the reverberations of the changes in the federal environment will likely be more acutely felt in FY2027 and beyond.

**How the WRC Is Funded:** The WRC receives most of its funding through performance-based grants and/or contracts. Town assessments constitute a small but very important percentage of our funding (typically 6 percent of our total budget in a given year). For the 2026 fiscal year, the

WRC's total budget of approximately \$2,087,282 million is derived from 47 percent regional project grant funding, 13 percent town technical assistance funding, 33 percent state performance-based contract (core) funding, and 7 percent from town assessments. Of the total budget, \$584,618, about 29 percent, will be expended on grants (brownfields) or consultant services (brownfields, special projects).

The vast majority of the WRC's revenue sources are tied to contracts with specific scopes of work, guidelines and/or performance measures that are negotiated between all of the state's 11 regional planning commissions and the state agency that manages the funds and/or program in question. This means that the WRC has limited control over how it chooses to use the majority of its funding and, by extension, its own work priorities. Nevertheless, the grants we receive enable us to work with our towns on areas such as transportation, emergency planning, community development, brownfields redevelopment, and water quality.

Towns also retain the services of the WRC directly (referred to as town technical assistance above). These services typically relate to assistance with town plans or bylaws, local hazard mitigation plans, transportation system inventories (road erosion, bridge and culvert, signs, etc.), and project management for towns related to state or federal grants. In some cases towns will enter into a municipal service agreement with the WRC and pay for the service solely with town funds. Historically towns have more often secured state or federal grants to support the needed work.

Funding received through town assessments is a small but very important percentage of our overall budget. While very limited in quantity, town assessments allow the greatest latitude to respond to WRC-identified needs in the region. Some grant sources, most notably transportation and emergency planning, come to us through state agencies but the funding originates with the federal government. Most funding with federal origins requires matching funds, and typically non-federal matching funds. Required match ranges from 10 percent (Transportation Planning Initiative) to 50 percent (Emergency Management Planning Grant). State performance contract and town assessment funds are essential sources for non-federal matching funds.

**General Revenue:** The WRC's general revenue is composed of town assessments, funding through a performance-based contract with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and interest income.

The terms of the DHCD contract are negotiated between the state's regional planning commissions (RPCs) as a group and the agency, and the standard amount received by each regional planning commission is derived from a standard formula. The WRC's contract with DHCD

is available for review upon request. The standard contract funding is derived through the state property transfer tax. The Municipal and Regional Planning Fund (MRPF) is a key State funding source for planning. The MRPF provides substantial funding to the regional planning commissions, limited funding to municipalities through the Municipal Planning Grant program, as well as funding for the VT Center for Geographic Information (VCGI). Pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4306(2), the MRPF “shall be composed of 17 percent of the revenue from the property transfer tax under 32 V.S.A. chapter 231 and any monies from time to time appropriated to the Fund by the General Assembly or received from any other source, private or public.” While RPCs did receive a very significant increase to their base funding for the first time in 20 years in FY2023, with additional increases in FY2024 and 2025, full funding per the statutory formula has not been appropriated by the legislature. For FY2026 the RPCs received a 2.5 percent increase over the FY2025 level. The state’s 11 RPCs will continue to advocate for funding per the formula in order to more fully serve our towns and regional planning needs.

The work supported through our general revenue reflects our mission, addresses regional and municipal needs identified by the Commission and authorized by state statute, and responds to the required performance measures of the grant with DHCD.

**Project Revenue:** This revenue stream is composed of discrete projects that support Windham Region town needs (Town Technical Assistance) and projects that address needs or opportunities for the region as a whole (Regional Projects). Most are governed by individual contracts, grants, or other work agreements consistent with the WRC's mission. It is not unusual for projects to emerge that may not be known at the time of the creation of this Work Program and Budget and will be added mid-year. Therefore, the Project Revenue portion of the budget, and the projects reflected in the Work Program, are to some degree a statement of expectation of work to be done.

### **Work Program Initiative Highlights for FY2026**

- Updating of the just-adopted Windham Regional Plan to become Act 181-compliant.
- Cooperative work with the other 10 Regional Planning Commissions as guided by our common performance-based contracts with DHCD. Broad work categories include maintaining the regional plan; consultation with towns about their plans and planning processes; providing training for town officials and volunteers; engaging in Act 250 and Section 248 processes; engaging in regional and statewide policy issues; and generally supporting our full range of statutory duties, as funding permits;
- Working with member towns in support of their local planning projects, including municipal plan and bylaw update efforts;

- Providing planning support to towns and villages that want to explore water and wastewater infrastructure needs as a means by which to achieve compact settlement patterns, retain existing homes and business, accommodate new development, and adapt to flooding;
- Base mapping for member towns as feasible;
- Continued cooperation with federal, state, municipal and non-profit partners with disaster response and recovery efforts;
- Continued work with member towns and Vermont Emergency Management on state, regional, and local emergency planning and preparedness, support of the Regional Emergency Management Committee, and assistance with local flood hazard bylaw and local hazard mitigation plan updates (this assumes continued EMPG funding for RPCs);
- Working with and supporting partner organizations regarding broad regional issues, such as housing, economic development, healthy communities, and high-speed broadband access.
- Assisting towns and transportation service providers on regional transportation planning through the Vermont transportation planning initiative and other related programs; continued work with local, state and federal entities to maintain and improve an effective and efficient regional transportation network. This includes serving on the Southeast Vermont Transit Board of Directors;
- Continuing implementation of the EPA-funded Windham Region Brownfield Reuse Initiative.

### **Areas of Work and Budget Estimates**

The work program and budget are presented here in a format that assists us in our required reporting on multiple grant agreements and related tracking of time and other expenses required by each of those agreements. The basis for the budget estimates for most items labeled “Core Work Elements” is derived from known allocations, prior years’ actual expenditures on ongoing areas of work, and our experience performing work within those areas. For FY2026 we’re taking a more conservative approach to estimating the number and revenue derived from “Special Projects” than we have previously. In past years the budget assumed a revenue allowance for as yet unknown projects based upon the experience of prior years. For FY2026 we have made no such assumptions in order to reflect what we assume will be a leaner revenue stream and related implications for our budget. For this reason, only known projects have been included.

Because the majority of our funding is received through grants and contracts with defined scopes of work, WRC Committees, Commissioners, and staff must necessarily be mindful of the funding context and what it means for work direction and commitment of staff hours. While this may at times feel limiting when it comes to Commissioner control of the WRC’s work agenda, Commissioners play a critical role in advising how this work should be approached to result in the most effective and beneficial outcomes for the towns we serve, and which they represent. And

to be clear, the identification and pursuit of the WRC's own initiatives for which there is little or no funding support can be achieved through direct engagement by Commissioners, often in partnership with other organizations, as well as towns.

The work that falls under the auspices of the Project Review Committee is always difficult to predict as we do not know what applications may come before the District Environmental Commission, the Public Utilities Commission, or federal agencies. It is through WRC engagement that the regional plan and its policies are represented and implemented in these permitting procedures, and we strive to balance effectiveness and efficiency within the context of this budget. The amount of effort required of WRC staff and Commissioners can vary greatly depending upon the scope and complexity of the application under consideration and the complexity of the review process. Should it become apparent that Project Review demands may exceed the hours allocated to the work, the Executive Director and the Project Review Committee Chair will engage the Executive Board in determining how to best balance the work to be done with available budgetary resources.

## **MUNICIPAL PLANNING SUPPORT**

### **CORE WORK ELEMENTS**

- Municipal Consultation - Advise local Planning Commissions and Selectboards on the goals, procedures, standards, preparation, adoption, maintenance, and implementation of town plans. Review existing town plans to advise planning commissions how well and to what extent the plans implement Vermont's statutory planning goals. Discuss planning needs of the community and provide updates on statutory requirements and relevant state programs.
- Bylaws & Land Use Controls - Assist local Planning Commissions and Selectboards with the preparation, revision, adoption and administration of local bylaws and related land use controls and other regulatory and non-regulatory programs that implement town plans.
- Town Plan Review, Approval & Confirmation – Review and confirm town plans per 24 V.S.A.§4350.
- Municipal Grants - Advise and assist towns that wish to participate in state, federal, and private grant-supported programs. Assist in the preparation of grant applications as feasible and appropriate. Serve as municipal project manager as appropriate and as capacity allows.
- Infrastructure/Capital Improvement Planning – Advise and assist towns with infrastructure and capital improvement plans, including community wastewater and water, and build-out models and analyses.

- General Municipal Assistance – Provide limited technical assistance to Towns concerning occasional planning and governance issues that may arise.

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

These include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Municipal Project Management – Assisting towns with the administration of grants and projects.
- Local Hazard Mitigation Plans – Assisting towns with the development and updating of FEMA-required local hazard mitigation plans.
- Municipal Planning Grants – Performing work for towns funded by the Municipal Planning Grant program of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.
- Municipal Service Agreements – Performing work authorized between an agreement between a town and the WRC. These projects are usually, but not always, funded using town funds rather than an external grant.
- Grants in Aid/Better Roads – Supporting town compliance with the state Municipal Roads General Permit

## REGIONAL PLANNING & PROJECT REVIEW

### CORE WORK ELEMENTS

- Update, adopt, and implement the Windham Regional Plan.
- Convene member towns to identify opportunities for more efficient and effective delivery of municipal services and governance through intermunicipal cooperation, and identify the appropriate role for the WRC in the facilitation and execution of cooperative efforts.
- Review and comment on Act 250, Section 248 and other development proposals of importance to the region. Review and comment on projects of critical regional significance within the jurisdiction of Federal agencies as necessary. Convene an ad hoc working group when required by 24 VSA Section 4345a (18) to assist towns regarding coordination with neighboring town plans.
- Seek and secure funding to address regional issues by preparing grant applications in accordance with the requirements of the WRC bylaws.
- Matching funds category for all WRC contributions in support of local and regional projects.

## REGIONAL PROJECTS

- Continue the Regional Transportation Planning Project as specified in the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) Work Program and funding agreement with the Vermont Agency of Transportation.
- Continue work on emergency management planning and related activities as supported by the Emergency Management Performance Grant administered by Vermont Emergency Management.
- Continue the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-funded Windham Region Brownfields Reuse Initiative.
- Continue work on a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-funded Brownfields Redevelopment Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund.
- Engage in matters related to climate change including greenhouse gas reduction and climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and migration.
- Continue water resources planning under contract with VT Agency of Natural Resources, pursuant to the 604(b) program.
- Continue water quality basin planning under contract with VT Agency of Natural Resources.
- Undertake other Regional Special Projects when supported by funding agreements.

## INFORMATION AND TRAINING

### CORE WORK ELEMENTS

- Maintain WRC website and regional plan website, electronic and physical archives, and respond to public information requests.
- Prepare and distribute regular and special editions of WRC Newsletter, Work Programs, Annual Reports, agendas and other materials to the public and to local officials in order to improve public education on planning topics, to increase awareness of the Commission's activities, and to generally inform the public regarding issues being addressed by the Commission.
- Hold informational programs, workshops, public forums, training sessions and/or public hearings for Commissioners, local officials and interested citizens. Participate with other

groups and organizations in their public involvement efforts such as serving on panel discussions and speaking at community organization meetings.

- Assist public agencies, developers and citizens with basic information on 10 VSA Ch 151 (Act 250), 30 VSA Sect 248 (Public Utility Commission), and other environmental laws and regulations.
- Conduct one or more orientation and training meetings for regional Commissioners, and other Commissioner development activities, at the direction of the Executive Board.
- Maintain GIS capacity as a regional information resource.
- Maintain the Commission's information technology infrastructure, including remote meeting support.

## **REGIONAL & STATEWIDE COLLABORATION**

### **CORE WORK ELEMENTS**

- Participate in groups or initiatives in which Regional Planning Commissions have statutorily-defined roles. Collaborate with the planning, legislative or executive authorities of federal and state agencies, other regions, and municipalities.
- Collaborate with the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone, the Windham County Economic Development Program, and other local, regional, and state entities to develop and update economic development plans and/or strategies and/or projects, including the Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and the Southern Vermont Economic Zone.
- Participate in activities of the National Association of Development Organizations, the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association, the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, the Vermont Planners Association, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and other organizations when consistent with the WRC mission.
- Develop Municipal Training Materials with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, regional planning commissions, and other partners.
- Collaborate with other regional planning commissions, state and federal agencies, institutions of higher learning, and other stakeholders in developing and implementing regional and municipal needs and capacity assessments, including those related to infrastructure.

## **PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

### **CORE WORK ELEMENTS**

- Provide administrative, clerical and accounting support for the Commission's core work program outlined above.
- Hold regular Commission and Executive Board meetings.
- Prepare reports on Commission activities and programs including a WRC Annual Report and Town Meeting Reports for each member town in the region.
- Prepare and adopt a FY2027 Work Program and Budget.
- Support the Commission's committee structure. Maintain approved Purpose and Objective Statements for each WRC committee.
- Maintain the Commission's financial management system. Prepare regular quarterly progress and financial reports. Issue a request for proposals for professional audit services, as needed. Commission a formal audit covering the core program, special programs and grant finances. Commission a single-audit as required by federal guidance. Prepare annual indirect cost proposal for review by cognizant state agency.
- Administer the Commission's Personnel Policies, including all employee personnel matters, staff development and support to the Personnel Committee.