

The Municipal Network / Meeting Notes / 10/15/09

Bugbee Senior Center White River Junction, VT

Introductions (Peter Gregory) - Thank you to NH Charitable Foundation – Upper Valley Region for their financial support to promote and strengthen inter-municipal cooperation and collaboration. Also, thanks to The Bugbee Center for letting us use this space.

Keynote Speaker -- Scott Johnstone, Executive Director – Vermont Energy Institute Corporation (VEIC)

For all we've learned about planning, and for all we may want to do to modify human behavior, there's one enduring attribute that trumps everything else and that is that the height of land drives the organizing of settlement patterns.

We trust the government that's closest to us even though equally good people serve us at each ascending level of government. Because of this it becomes a growing challenge to convince residents to trust the implementation of regional cooperation. To overcome this, you must ADD VALUE to the equation to overcome people's reticence. In other words, problems can only be solved by adding value.

There are good examples of this happening – water and waste districts are things that can't be done efficiently at the most local levels of government. As planners, we may get upset when residents don't 'get it', but if you don't make the value statement clear, you can't get buy-in. Sometimes you have to be creative to add value. It may mean adding a nonprofit entity to the equation. They can sometimes accomplish things that even regional governments can't do. One nonprofit in the Burlington area that has been successful in promoting all things pedestrian and bike-powered is Localmotion.

With respect to transportation, we can do it better all together. Transportation issues are really land use issues, and it gets very knotty when one town tries to tell another town how it should use its land. Nothing gets people angrier. Sometimes financial expediency leads to poor planning. As local planners, we've often pushed the highest density uses close to state numbered highways even if it doesn't make the most sense to put it there just because as those highways get filled up and wear out, we get more federal dollars to maintain them.

People are all fighting for the same basic values: safe communities, good schools, and high quality of life. They'll fight for these and, conversely, no one ever says they'll fight for good (or better) transportation. For residents, transportation is a TOOL to get the other values. As planners, we have to figure out how to re-frame the issue so that residents see transportation as a value equal to good schools and safe communities. The problem is that transportation fixes cost a lot of money and we can't afford the bills to maintain the status quo much less anything else to which we aspire. So, ultimately, if we can show an 'added value', we'll be able to find the dollars to make the improvements we want.

Local Projects

Enfield Build-out analysis – Dave Saladino reporting

Goal is to bring business to Route 4 corridor. Did an inventory parcel by parcel to figure out which were underutilized, then did a projection of what potential revenue would be generated.

Value to other towns: The template could be utilized by other municipalities

Partners: RSG, UVLSRPC, Enfield Planning Board.

Route 4 Corridor Study in Vermont – Pete Fellows reporting

Goal was to address the question of how to maintain Route 4 as a viable corridor. Less a traffic

study than a land use issue. *Value to other towns*: model for doing studies of other arterial highways/corridors.

Partners: TRORC (mission: advance state goals through regional planning while serving our member towns), RSG, Steering Committee, NPOs

Truck Traffic Route Planning in Claremont, NH. Nate Miller reporting

Goal: get truck traffic through Claremont without routing them through Opera House Square. Problem is that 4 state numbered routes converge on Opera House Square. Factoid from NHDOT Commissioner: the impact of one loaded eighteen-wheeler on our roads is the equivalent of 9,600 cars. *Value to other towns*: efficient ways devised to modify traffic patterns.

Partners: RSG, UVLSRPC, City of Claremont

Transit for Underserved Populations – Pat Crocker reporting

Goal: utilize scarce federal and state resources as efficiently as possible to get people who can't drive or don't have access to a car to/from medical appointments and other errands. *Value to other towns*: project has now spread up into Cohasset County.

Partners: Sullivan and Grafton United Ways, UVLSRPC, and Endowment for Health.

Office/garage complex for Connecticut River Transit (CRT or "The Current") – Jason Rasmussen reporting

Goal: find better bus storage/maintenance facility for regional transit provider.

Had to move quickly to utilize unexpended fund balance from project to renovate RR station in Bellows Falls to purchase/renovate facility for CRT. *Value to other towns*: CRT reduces congestion, improves air quality, and reduces workers' commuting expense as it carries many passengers to/from job center on its fixed transit routes.

Partners: Windham Regional Commission, SWCRPC, Town of Rockingham, Senator Leahy's office

Proposed Multi-modal Facility – Christine Walker reporting

Goal: Using \$500,000 earmark from Congress Paul Hodes' office to plan a transit hub in I-89 corridor to serve inter-city bus service providers and local transit providers. Need to find a 10-15 acre parcel to accommodate ~ 1,000 parking spaces. (There is potential for structured parking which would reduce spatial demands.) UVTransportation Management Association is helping to organize and facilitate public outreach/informational meetings. A meeting on 11/17 at Bugbee Center will review sites proposed by the UVLSRPC. *Value to other towns*: will help all residents in entire commutershed by improving mobility, reducing congestion.

Partners: Many! 21 members of advisory committee convened by UVLSRPC represent employers, municipalities and transit providers.

(dinner break)

Scott Johnstone made some observations about the local project reports and identified some common threads that tied them together.

His comments: It is clear you are all ramping up to regionalism by adding value beyond your borders; addressing issues that vex people; and leveraging efficiency by working together. By creating a wider service area and by working with more people, you can be assured of attracting more money.

He suggested our next step is to get some "how" statements circulating

- How we do it creatively (by partnering)
- How we engage stakeholders (by amplifying their voices)
- How we use nonprofit organizations creatively (as catalysts).

Crackerbarrel section (led by Christine Walker)

What else is happening in your communities?

Lebanon PB is updating their Master Plan which has a transportation chapter. As the main job

center of the Upper Valley (population climbs from 13,000 at night to over 30,000 during the daytime hours), we have to work together. Arterial roads are being re-engineered/ reconfigured to include bike lanes and sidewalks at the same time the EPA-mandated segregation of storm water runoff work is being done.

Hartford - It took 11 years to get a bike/ped path project in Wilder to get funding and approvals. It took as long to get a Visitor's Center built at Quechee Gorge to address the problem of 50,000 visitors annually to the Gorge. Caution was urged not to build to the worstcase scenario as we end up with excess capacity b/c worst cases are rarely hit.

Norwich – has a new bus stop out by the playing fields where parking was already in place. This project didn't take very long as a no-brainer. ON the other hand, the Norwich Corridor Study has taken a very long time to implement, and in the meantime advocates for the project have gotten discouraged and resigned from the committee. The bike lane portion of the Corridor Study has just been completed and is very popular, but we didn't get the trees we had hoped for as AOT doesn't like trees in their right-of- way.

Park-and-ride (P&R) lots – NHDOT is about to ink a contract with the Morman church in *Enfield* that will allow them to use the existing parking facility as a P&R lot. Plainfield is planning for two small P&R lots on Route 120. On Taft Flats (Route 5), *Hartford* got a small one approved for 30 cars on a state-owned piece of land near Exit 12 of I-91, although the state still won't let them post signs near the exit ramps to advertise its existence. *Other P&R lots* on private parcels around the region are being explored. We need many more smaller P&R lots to catch people before they hit congestion points. Traffic now backs into the travel lanes on I-89 at exit 18 in the AM. And some people believe the congestion problems won't be solved until we get employers/towns to charge much more for metered parking that will incentivize people to use public transit. Cheap or free parking 'drives' people to use their cars.

Hanover – has implemented several successful roundabouts. It used tax incentive fund (TIF), similar to what *Enfield* is using, to build their structured parking garage in its downtown district.

What suggestions do people have for our next steps?

- Explore tri-town tax sharing agreement in North Country.
- Learn more about Maine's new effort to create a "Transfer of Access Rights" which addresses the ways to manage corridor wide development.
- Look at the economy of our region – what exists currently? And what lies ahead? For this, build out analyses are very helpful. But can't simply merge all the ones that were recently completed as it's likely different assumptions were made in framing each one. A region – wide build out analysis would be very expensive to write.
- What are the patterns of growth?
- Comprehensive region-wide maps would be helpful as we don't see the connections between the different municipal infrastructural elements.
- Keep an eye out for the new Sustainable Communities Initiative legislation. It may be we can get some of the regional studies funded that we want.

Written on behalf of the Municipal Network Planning Committee
Peter Gregory – Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission
Christine Walker – Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
Tom Kennedy – Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission
Barbara McIlroy – Upper Valley League of Women Voters
Len Cadwallader – Vital Communities