



## Northeastern Vermont Development Association

**At Work in FY 2019**

### NVDA IS UNIQUE IN THAT IT COMBINES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

to deliver a broad array of services to more than 50 communities in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties. Collectively, our planning and economic development staff deliver thousands of hours of technical assistance annually in support of our mission of “improving the quality of life in the Northeast Kingdom through planning, promoting economic development, and preserving the region’s natural environment.”



## **MUNICIPAL PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION**

Our region is the most rural in the state where few communities have dedicated planning or economic development staff. Nevertheless, the planning needs of our region are varied and complex. Despite our “ruralness” a great number of our towns are actively planning and promoting development. As of September, we had 37 municipalities with current plans, and 3 others in the adoption process. Notably, Irasburg adopted their first-ever plan and Brunswick will adopt their plan after nearly two decades. Our range of planning services goes well beyond planning and zoning as we work to meet communities where they are at. Here is a sampling of our implementation activities in FY2019:

**Three Rivers Path Extension & Trailhead Center:** NVDA continues to assist St. Johnsbury with management of this project that will extend the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail into the heart of St. Johnsbury’s downtown. NVDA assisted the Town in securing additional funding for cleanup of hazardous materials at the trailhead site and funded site assessment activities of a former industrial parcel along the path extension.

The project will be a catalyst for the redevelopment of the Bay Street area of downtown St. Johnsbury, with a focus on the river and recreation. Expected outcomes are increased activity in the downtown, improved sales at downtown businesses, job growth related to tourism and recreation, and improved quality of life for residents of the densely populated downtown.

**Danville “Village to Village” Master Planning:** As the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) continues to expand opportunities for recreation and visitor tourism, the Town of Danville looks to leverage its economic benefits. NVDA is part of a steering committee comprised of representatives from the Town of Danville, Agencies of Transportation and Commerce to guide this Better Connections-funded project to completion. “Village to Village” is a master planning effort to connect the Route 2/LVRT corridor between Danville Village and the activity hub at West Danville. The endeavor was aided by a *Quick Build for Health* grant that allowed the community to establish bike-friendly amenities along the trail, including a water station and a bicycle repair station at the Danville Train Depot. The community also obtained Village Center Designation for West Danville, the site of many of the proposed upgrades and amenities.

**Concord - Burke Recreation Planning:** After assisting the Towns of Burke and Concord in securing a consortium MPG, NVDA continues to provide support to a gravel rides bike - mapping project in the towns of Burke and Concord.

**St. Johnsbury Housing Committee:** NVDA continues providing staff support to the St. Johnsbury Housing Committee, a group working to improve the condition and selection of quality housing in the town. In FY2019, NVDA helped formulate an “Accessibility Modification Incentive Program” intended to increase the number of apartments in town that are accessible to persons with mobility impairments, including those associated with age.

**Newport City Waterfront & Main Street Master Plan:** NVDA provided staff and technical support to the Newport Advisory Committee and VHB Consultant Team to develop *Newport’s Waterfront & Main Street Master Plan*. With the City’s location on Lake Memphremagog and its focus on developing the outdoor recreational economy, the plan will serve as a road map to revitalize the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods through better access to the waterfront and better streetscapes for improved pedestrian, cycling and auto traffic. The plan was awarded a *Vermont Public Places Award* that recognizes public spaces which have been defined or enriched by planning, design, and regulations that promote positive public uses and benefits.

Other FY2019 highlights include:

- NVDA convened an Opportunity Zones information session for developers in the region with the intent to increase understanding of this federal economic development tool, particularly as it might relate to new housing developments. NVDA will continue to provide support to the three OZ communities in the region - Newport, St. Johnsbury, and Lyndon - in formulating a prospectus that can be shared with potential developers and to attract investors.
- NVDA efforts to revitalize the region's village centers continued in FY2019, as we assisted Coventry, Barnet, and Westfield to earn Village Center designation, making tax credits available for important investment projects. To date, we have 28 designated Village Centers in the region. NVDA is working with the Towns of Holland, Waterford, and Irasburg on their Village Center maps and applications.
- In FY2019, NVDA staff worked with seven communities to amend municipal plans – many that included enhanced energy sections that will meet Act 174 standards for receiving substantial deference. These included Peacham, Sutton, Norton, Unified Towns & Gores, Holland, Troy, and Burke. NVDA worked with the Town of Sutton to develop a community survey that will inform their plan update. NVDA worked with the Town of Westmore to develop screening standards for ground-mounted solar plants.

## REGIONAL PLANNING

NVDA and all RPCs coordinate planning at the regional level through the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive regional plan and related studies. These plans guide local planning and the investment decisions of the public and private sectors.

**Update - Energy Plan and Regional Plan Amendment:** With a determination of energy compliance from the Department of Public Service, NVDA reviews and certifies local plans in our region who wish to receive Substantial Deference in the Section 248 process. During FY2019, NVDA was able to certify the plans of seven municipalities: Brighton, Charleston, Greensboro, Holland, Irasburg, Morgan, and Westfield. We expect about a half dozen towns to seek Substantial Deference in the coming fiscal year.

**NEK Food Cycle Coalition:** NVDA, NEK Waste Management District, state and local officials, and community development organizers continue to meet monthly at NVDA offices to reduce the loss of edible food by redirecting it to those who need it. The group follows Vermont's hierarchy for food wastes – reducing waste at the source, redirecting it for people, animals, compost, and energy recovery. The group received a USDA Rural Development grant to conduct a feasibility study for a sustainable food rescue distribution network.

## ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth is most effective when partnered with solid planning functions. Because we are a fully integrated organization, holistic economic and community development is an NVDA forte.

**The Hardwick Yellow Barn Business Accelerator and Corporate Campus (aka "Yellow Barn")** will strengthen Vermont's farm- and food-based economy by allowing multiple establishments to grow and expand with other entrepreneurs, develop new products, and improve export to external markets. The

project will consist of a two-story, 40,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose processing facility and an innovative adaptive reuse of the historic 3,400 sq. ft. yellow barn – already an iconic presence along the Route 15 gateway to downtown Hardwick.

NVDA is serving as a partner and project manager in this unique public-private endeavor to offer best-in-class production and administrative space to new and expanding businesses at highly competitive rates. Our partner, the CAE operates the Vermont Food Venture Center, a business incubator for farm- and food-based businesses immediately adjacent to the site, making Yellow Barn an ideal next step for incubator graduates. Two long-term anchor tenants are already committed, one of which will establish a local food retail destination. The site is also adjacent to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, ensuring high visibility and market penetration to accelerator tenants. Yellow Barn is scheduled to commence construction in the spring of 2020 and will be ready for full occupancy in 2021.

**VT - Quebec Enterprise Initiative:** NVDA completed its work with the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce on the VQEI initiative. With funding from the Northern Border Regional Commission, we were able to successfully assist four small Quebec-based businesses to locate to the region. These include Pratico, Inc., Gilbert Technologies, Miti Manufacturing, and Theo Décor. We were also able to assist eleven existing manufacturers with employee training through programs offered by the VT Manufacturing Extension Center. Programs included Lean Manufacturing, Structured Problem Solving, Set-up Reduction, and Manager Training. As a result of this, 98 incumbent workers have improved work skills.

**Vermont Talent Pipeline:** A skilled and ready workforce is a critical issue locally and statewide. In FY2019, NVDA continued partnering in the VTTPM initiative. This effort convenes employers from three industry sectors to identify their industry-specific issues and develop employer-led workforce solutions. The participant industries remained construction, health care, and advanced manufacturing. Employer Collaboratives were formed for all industry sectors; Needs Assessments were completed for each sector; and, Career Ladders have been developed for the Construction and Healthcare sectors. Education providers are beginning to engage in implementing the solutions identified by the employers.

**Newport City Renaissance Corporation:** In FY2019, NVDA assisted Newport City Downtown Development - the organization that maintains the City's designated downtown district - with the renewal of downtown designation (granted in February 2018 for an 8-year period). The State's Downtown Designation Program supports local revitalization efforts across the state through providing technical assistance and funding. NVDA is assisting the downtown organization to develop funding and staffing strategies with a strategic focus to create a four-season outdoor recreation economy in Newport. Working with the local Board and committees, NVDA is assisting the organization to use current studies to design projects that create connections and activities that better link Newport's Main street to its waterfront as part of the investments in the outdoor recreational economy. Importantly, NVDA assistance helped Newport to receive one of VT's first VOREC awards.

**Grant Assistance:** In any year, NVDA provides grant support to many community and economic development efforts in the region. In FY19, successful grant applications were submitted to NBRC, USDA Rural Development, EDA, and the VT Department of Buildings & General Services to name a few.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

NVDA conducts its regional **Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI)** through a contract with VTrans. This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning improvements to Vermont's

transportation system, with communities represented through regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs). Each regional TAC prioritizes projects, identifies local and regional transportation needs, and provides the platform for public involvement in the planning and development of the state's transportation system.

In FY19, NVDA continued assisting communities and projects through our yearly traffic and pedestrian counting program. A very significant of NVDA staff time also continued through assistance to our municipalities through the grants-in-aid program. Staff also provide support to local communities through consultant procurement and serving on local project teams.

NVDA also supports the efforts of Rural Community Transportation with technical, strategic, and advisory expertise. We remain a vital participant on the RCT Board of Directors, where we leverage our many partnerships and collaborations throughout our region to benefit public transit and improve the transportation opportunities for the least fortunate and most in need citizens. In FY19, RCT made efforts to bring awareness of transportation services to the general population.

## **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & DISASTER RESILIENCY**

NVDA plays a key role in hazard mitigation and emergency preparedness through its work with Vermont Emergency Management, the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VT Agency of Transportation, and the Agency of Natural Resources. NVDA provides staff assistance to the State Emergency Operations Center, administrative support to the Local Emergency Planning Committees, and coordination among responders in our Public Safety Districts. NVDA also provides assistance with local floodplain bylaws, prepare FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency plans, and provide assistance as needed in special circumstances such as federally declared disasters.

**Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP):** Beginning in 2019, the LEMP replaced the Local Emergency Operations Plan. The required LEMP asks for more information and requires more training from select board members. This proved to be a challenge to many communities due to select board member's various schedules. As a result of this change, we now have 20 communities with adopted Local Emergency Management Plans for FY 2019, with five more plans pending adoption by the select board.

**Table-Top Exercise:** In FY 2019, NVDA's Emergency Management Specialist participated (along with multiple agencies and first responders) in a table top exercise at Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital (NVRH) – a significant planning effort. The objective of this exercise was to test the capability of our local hospitals, NVRH and North Country Hospital, as well as our EMS, fire, and law enforcement personnel to handle an incident where patients had to be evacuated from the hospitals.

**Local Hazard Management Plans:** NVDA staff assisted with the development of hazard mitigation plans that can minimize losses, as well as out-of-pocket costs in federal disasters. This year Concord, Coventry, Granby, and Peacham adopted Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, bringing the total number of towns with current plans to 23.

**National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP):** NVDA staff met with officials in the Town of Morgan to explore participation in the NFIP, which would make affordable flood insurance available to every resident. Staff also worked with the Town of Westmore to develop flood hazard regulations that would, at a minimum, make the town eligible for participation in the NFIP.

## **GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM SERVICES**

GIS mapping supports all aspects of the variety of planning work done at NVDA. Land Use Planning Maps, maps for communities applying for Downtown or Village Center Designation, Energy mapping of preferred sites, and numerous maps were produced for grant applications and projects for the towns and for the region are all supported by our GIS mapping program.

## **ENERGY CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT**

NVDA integrates energy planning with land use, transportation and natural resources efforts, and economic development to assist with project implementation. We also participate in Section 248 proceedings and support comprehensive planning at the local and regional level to inform the permitting process.

**Local Enhanced Energy Plans:** In FY2019, NVDA worked with Westfield, Greensboro, Irasburg, and Peacham. Our region now has seven municipalities with plans that will receive “substantial deference” in the Section 248 process. This status gives each community a stronger voice in the review process for siting renewable energy projects.

**Local Energy Committees:** Our municipalities continue to advocate for clean and efficient energy at the local level. Danville, Westmore, and Barnet joined the towns of Peacham, Ryegate, Sutton, Glover, and Craftsbury in taking local action for forming energy committees. NVDA worked with Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Northwoods Stewardship Center to host a Regional Energy Forum in Charleston. The March event drew more than 30 attendees. NVDA also worked with the Vermont Natural Resources Council and Heat Squad to co-host a webinar on identifying and financing thermal efficiency strategies.

## **WATERSHED PLANNING & PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

Nonpoint source pollution, such as phosphorous loading, is an issue of key concern statewide. NVDA has engaged in a number of partnerships with state agencies, municipalities, and various public and private organization to achieve holistic solutions that focus on local actions with far-ranging impacts.

**Water Quality Advisory Committee:** NVDA’s vast region encompasses six watershed basins, while a seventh (the Winooski) touches the region. This year, staff continued the efforts initiated in FY2017 when the Water Quality Advisory Committee was formed. In FY2019 staff collaborated with the committee as well as multiple stakeholders to develop strategic plans to protect or restore specific waters, and identify appropriate funding and resources to complete the work.

**Memphremagog Study Advisory Group:** NVDA participates as a partner with our local municipalities. MSAG is an advisory council assembled by the International Joint Commission to make recommendations for solutions to reducing phosphorus levels in Lake Memphremagog. A phosphorus reduction of 29% is needed to meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards. NVDA also provides support to the Memphremagog Stormwater Collaborative.

**Grants in Aid:** NVDA collaborated with the Department of Environmental Conservation, VAPDA, and VTrans to reach out to its member municipalities to participate in the Grants in Aid program, a pilot project which provides funding to municipalities to implement best management practices on municipal roads ahead of the upcoming Municipal Roads General Permit. In FY2019, NVDA directed grants to 34

municipalities in our region, totaling \$343,800. Projects are designed to reduce and/or eliminate erosion on municipal roads.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- In FY2019 a coalition comprised of NVDA, the Town of St. Johnsbury and the City of Newport continued implementing their **EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant** to facilitate redevelopment of aging, underutilized and potentially contaminated properties in the region. Environmental assessment activities that are facilitating redevelopments have been completed or are nearing completion in Albany (community store), Hardwick (business accelerator), Lyndon (park project), Newport (park project), and St. Johnsbury (housing development, recreation path project, distillery, and a commercial building for new businesses).
- In FY2019, NVDA received business program funding from **USDA Rural Development** to advance local efforts to bring about or improve broadband infrastructure in the region. Funds will be used to establish and/or assist local broadband committees interested in improving their broadband situation. Lyndon and neighboring towns are interested in establishing a Communications Union District that will have the ability to implement locally-driven broadband solutions. USDA funds will aid this effort.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FUNDING**

NVDA's revenues came from numerous sources, including a share of the state's property transfer funds; private, state, and federal grants; and annual appropriations from each of our 50+ member communities. We also received rental income from our multi-tenant buildings in St. Johnsbury and Lyndonville, and other income from contracted services, such as grant administration, as well as municipal plan and bylaw development, which is usually funded by Municipal Planning Grants.

NVDA also has two Nonprofit Community Development Organization (NCDO) relending funds capitalized by loan repayments from Community Development Block Grants. NVDA made loans to three businesses in FY2019.

Our FY2018 audit, like previous years, produced no significant findings. Our FY2019 audit will be available in December.

Since 2012, NVDA has published a monthly e-newsletter covering a broad range of news and announcements, training and incentive programs, funding opportunities, a calendar of events, information relating to energy & natural resources, and important updates for municipalities relating to planning, zoning, and economic development. The newsletter mailing list reaches a diverse audience of more than 1,200 individuals within Essex, Orleans, Caledonia counties and beyond. NVDA distributes a quarterly newsletter to nearly 300 stakeholders in the region's thriving food and agricultural sector. NVDA also maintains a Facebook page for the organization.

Everything presented above is a representative sample of all of the work that we do each year. As always, NVDA staff is willing to respond to questions and discuss our work with our board, communities, and the public. **Thank you for your support!**