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**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING**  
**NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**  
January 26, 2011 Meeting Minutes

The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was held at the Franklin-Grand Isle Workforce Investment Board in Swanton, VT.

Commissioners: See attached. A quorum was present to conduct business.  
Staff: C. Dimitruk, G. Brunswick

**Welcome, introductions, opening remarks**

Chair M. Guernsey began the meeting at 7: 00 p.m.

**Opportunity for Public Comment**

None.

**Guest: Senator Randy Brock**

M. Guernsey introduced Senator Randy Brock representing most of Franklin County and Alburgh. R. Brock thanked the Commission for inviting him. R. Brock reported on some of his recent experiences in the Legislature. The Governor's budget address was yesterday, which recommends regional organizations at level funding. That being said, he noted there are lots of cuts. The proposal addresses a 137 million dollar gap. He noted the State will not be receiving stimulus money this year, which makes it more challenging than last.

R. Brock reviewed a Health Care Study, which considered three different plans for health care in Vermont. It recommended a single payer system with public/private partnerships. R. Brock described the plan and noted that the legislature will be debating it.

R. Brock discussed another report on tax structure. The report looked at whether the Vermont tax structure should be changed. The report is tax neutral in its recommendation. He noted that the Vermont income tax is based on total income, rather than adjusted gross income. Changing to AGI would increase the tax base, lowering the tax rate. He also discussed the idea of taxing more services as a method of bringing in more revenue.

R. Brock discussed another report on taxing expenditures. The study questions the reasoning for the numerous tax credits, deductions and exclusions. The basis of the study is that anything that we don't tax we could tax, which could add up to a significant amount of money.

D. DeBevec asked R. Brock about the prospects of regional organizations given Challenges for Change. R. Brock explained that Challenges for Change was necessary and important because the State faced a huge budget gap. In creating Challenges for Change, the legislature was looking at how the State could re-engineer what it does and focus on the end result. Some parts worked well, while others, including some of the proposals for consolidation, were done at high levels without understanding of how things really operated. R. Brock reported that Challenges for Change is not entirely dead. The Committee is still in business, but how it will play out in this administration is unknown.

A. Baderstadt noted that Challenges for Change has fundamental problems and that consolidating regional organizations into one call center instead of local offices is flawed. It will cost a lot of money down the road to decouple and fix the problems. R. Brock agreed that clearly

1 there are problems. He noted that cut backs are too often at counter level, rather than in the  
2 bureaucracy. A lot of processes need to be re-engineered.

3  
4 C. Leach asked whether R. Brock sees any progress in making the state more business friendly.  
5 R. Brock explained that on one side we really need to look at the high tax rates to encourage more  
6 businesses to locate in Vermont, but on the other hand, the most vulnerable people would benefit  
7 from higher taxes to support social services. This tension is there every year and will certainly be  
8 there this year. R. Brock suggested capitalizing on our success in advertising Vermont as a  
9 tourist destination.

10  
11 J. Luneau asked about education spending. R. Brock noted that costs are up and the number of  
12 students is down. He discussed the need for mergers to bring down cost. He explained that  
13 Vermont's student-teacher ratio of 10:1 is the lowest in the country. R. Brock suggested raising  
14 the student-teacher ratio to 13:1 (the national average is about 15:1) would close the gap, and still  
15 Vermont would be better than the national average.

16  
17 S. Jensen asked if special education costs are factored in. R. Brock said no, but that they look at  
18 those numbers. They do try to equalize the equation by taking out administration of special  
19 education.

20  
21 E. Gelinas asked if the legislature ever looked into a flat tax rate. R. Brock reported that the Tax  
22 Commission did a bunch of modeling to see what a flat tax rate would look like in order to get the  
23 same amount of revenue. R. Brock believes that people at the lower end of the income scale  
24 would pay higher taxes and people at the higher end would pay lower taxes. He does not believe  
25 there is any appetite for this at the legislature.

26  
27 M. Guernsey thanked R. Brock for this time.

## 28 29 **Minutes of the November 2010 Meeting**

30  
31 *P. Lerner motioned to approve the November 2010 minutes. L. Touchette seconded. Motion*  
32 *carried with 1 abstention.*

## 33 34 **Commission Reports**

35  
36 Finance/Operations: H. Garrett reported the Finance Committee did not meet in January, but they  
37 are planning to meet in February. He reported the format of this month's financial report has  
38 been revised and he hopes it will be easier for Commissioners to read.

39 J. Luneau asked whether 2010 census data is used for the most recent municipal assessments. C.  
40 Dimitruk responded the new census data will not be used until next year.

41  
42 Personnel: C. Dimitruk noted L. Scangas is not in attendance. She reported that Commissioners  
43 should have received a letter from D. Perry informing them of her departure. She is now  
44 employed with the Institute of Sustainable Communities. C. Dimitruk reported that during the  
45 process of setting up interviews for D. Perry's position, C. Mastrangelo gave her notice. She is  
46 moving to Oregon. C. Dimitruk noted they have identified 4 candidates, which are all from out of  
47 town. She completed initial interviews with S. Coleman over Skype and will be inviting at least  
48 three back for interviews with the Personnel Committee and staff. She noted they are hoping to  
49 select two candidates.

50

1 Executive Committee: M. Guernsey reported the Executive Committee met in December. They  
2 discussed the Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund manual and revisions to the Commissions  
3 bylaws. The Executive Committee is interested in revising the bylaws to allow for high school  
4 students to serve on the Board. The thinking is that participation during high school might  
5 encourage participation later in life. He will discuss the bylaw revisions in more detail later in the  
6 agenda.

7  
8 Policy/Project Review: C. Steen reported that Policy Project Review met before the Board  
9 meeting at 5:30. They reviewed two minor projects with no issues, which included Kane's Cow  
10 Power Section 248 approval and an access road within the St. Albans Town Industrial Park. C.  
11 Steen reported that they also reviewed a proposal for Hawk's Nest South. The project includes  
12 49 units of senior housing with access onto Grice Brook Road. The Committee's comments  
13 included expanding pedestrian connectivity to Upper Weldon Street and fencing off emergency  
14 access lanes.

15  
16 Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC): D. Leslie noted that the January TAC meeting was  
17 cancelled due to inclement weather.

18  
19 Energy Committee: B. Buermann reported that the Energy Committee did not meet due to  
20 inclement weather.

21  
22 VT Association of Planning and Development Agencies: S. Jensen reported that VAPDA met on  
23 December 2, 2010. She learned that the Agency of Commerce and Community Development  
24 received twice as many applications for Municipal Planning Grants than funding was available.  
25 This program is in the Governor's budget proposal with level funding. She reported that the  
26 National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) will be completing a statewide  
27 evaluation of Regional Planning Commissions. She also learned about the Vermont Council on  
28 Rural Development's Vermont Working Landscape Partnership. They have created a five point  
29 action plan. She reported some interesting statistics from the plan, including 43% of sawmills in  
30 the State have gone out of business. The plan states that 98% of Vermonters say the working  
31 landscape is the core of Vermont life. She noted an important conclusion of the study is  
32 unfortunately the State is not investing enough in the working landscape.

33 Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC): M. Savoy reported VEPC is meeting tomorrow.  
34 There is one application for Bariatric Nutritionals, which is a Canadian company relocating from  
35 South Burlington to the Georgia Industrial Park. The initial relocation came with 1 million  
36 dollars financing from the Vermont Economic Development Association. They doubled their  
37 size when they moved and are submitting a Vermont Employment Growth Investment application  
38 to initiate light manufacturing, which is great for the region. They have 17 Vermont employees  
39 currently. She hopes it is approved.

40  
41 Downtown Development Board: – C. Steen reported that there was no activity.

42  
43 Office: G. Brunswick reported on the progress of Revolving Loan Fund start-up. A contract is  
44 being prepared between NRPC and Union Bank for loan servicing and the program's attorney is  
45 working on preparing template loan and grant agreements. She is working on several municipal  
46 planning and zoning projects, including the St. Albans City Plan. She is working with the City  
47 Planning Commission on a community planning event to encourage public participation.

48  
49 C. Dimitruk reported she has completed a Regional Services Report in response to a request that  
50 arose during Challenges for Change. The report includes recommendations on how to improve  
51 the efficiency of delivering regional services. One highlight is a proposal to change the

1 Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act to allow a more specific process for re-  
2 adoption of municipal plans. Another option considered is turning Regional Planning  
3 Commissions into Councils of Governments where their only powers are those granted by  
4 municipalities. C. Dimitruk thinks this option has potential merit.

5  
6 S. Jensen noted the Governor's budget does have level funding for Regional Planning  
7 Commissions and Municipal Planning Grants. The Franklin County Industrial Development  
8 Corporation is level funded as well.

9  
10 M. Savoy noted she is concerned the performance contracts are based on a relationship to  
11 economic development when there is no statewide economic strategy. C. Dimitruk agreed with  
12 her concern and noted NRPC's contract with the State includes regional indicators that measure  
13 progress on meeting statewide planning goals. She noted that there is commitment in moving  
14 forward with some form of statewide economic strategy.

15  
16 C. Dimitruk reported the State's Total Maximum Daily Load for Lake Champlain was rejected by  
17 EPA and she is not sure what that means yet. In addition, Julie Moore is leaving the Agency. As  
18 a result, there will be a period of flux when it comes to water quality programs.

#### 19 20 **NRPC Bylaws**

21  
22 M. Guernsey referred to a copy of the present bylaws, which were included in the Board packet.  
23 He would like to appoint a sub-committee of interested people to go through the bylaws and come  
24 up with recommendations on how to revise them. There are no changes specifically proposed,  
25 except to potentially allow high school student membership on the Commission and to review the  
26 conflict of interest policy in light of the Revolving Loan Fund.

27  
28 J. Luneau asked why the bylaws state appointments are for 3 years, when many towns do not  
29 follow that policy. The Committee discussed the length of Commissioner terms and potentially  
30 changing representation to elected officials.

31  
32 D. DeBevec volunteered to assist the Executive Committee with bylaw revisions.

33  
34 M. Guernsey reminded the Commission of the process for officer elections. In March, he will  
35 appoint a Nominating Committee, who will put forth a slate of candidates for consideration at the  
36 June Board meeting.

#### 37 38 **RPC Evaluation Process**

39  
40 C. Dimitruk reported VAPDA hired NADO to do an evaluation of Regional Planning  
41 Commissions (RPCs), both internally and externally. NADO will look at how effective RPC's  
42 are in doing their jobs. They will be bringing a team to Vermont at the end of February to  
43 complete the evaluation. As part of the internal investigation they have developed a survey,  
44 which all Commissioners and staff will be asked to complete. The survey is one component of  
45 the evaluation; there will also be a peer evaluation between RPCs.

#### 46 47 **Other Business**

48 None.

#### 49 50 **Adjourn**

51 9:00 PM