

**NRPC Board of Commissioners
November 29, 2023 at 7:00 PM
American Legion Hall
100 Parah Drive, St Albans Town and virtually on Zoom**

Attendance: Commissioners: See attached. A quorum was present to conduct business.

Staff: Catherine Dimitruk, Bethany Remmers, Amy Adams, Greta Brunswick, Shaun Coleman, Christine Porcaro, Kyle Grenier, Barry Lampke, Dean Pierce, Emily Klofft, Marlena Valenta, Orla Duffy, Luke Slomba, and Sara Gratz
Guests: Bill Sheets.

Welcome, introductions, opening remarks.

Chair W. Irwin welcomed attendees and called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Adjustments to the Agenda: None.

Opportunity for Public Comment: No comments.

Minutes of the September 2023 Meeting

Y. Dandurand motioned to approve the September minutes. S. Bosquet seconded. K. Waite and H. DeMars abstained. Motion carried.

Project Review Committee Business Report

B. Buermann reported that VELCO presented to the committee on their proposed line rebuild. The committee determined the project does have substantial regional impact, and it is in conformance with the regional plan. The line will be built parallel to an existing line and within that line's right-of-way. The project also has the potential to alleviate SHEI issues.

Also, a new housing development in St. Albans has been determined not to have a substantial regional impact and to be in conformance with the regional plan. It will be filling in a spot between the road and a current condominium development and it will be using otherwise challenging sloped land.

The committee recommends approval of the VELCO plans as conformant to the regional plan; the other development does not need approval because it was determined not to have a substantial regional impact.

N. Speer motioned to act on the committee's recommendations. Y. Dandurand seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Municipal Spotlight: Presentation by local officials on Swanton and Highgate Projects

Swanton Village Manager Bill Sheets presented. Village voters passed an \$8 million bond in November for wastewater improvements. The Village will borrow \$4.9 million, and the state has agreed to provide \$1 million towards the improvements. Other projects include remediating a brownfields site at the former historic hotel property; Depot Street bridge repairs for next summer; upgrading the parking lot and road behind the park in to draw businesses into Merchant's Row; and adding a redundant waterline across the Missisquoi River.

Swanton's Electric Utility is focusing on resiliency measures including building new lines underground and relocating cross country lines to along roadsides. The Utility is in process of relicensing the Highgate dam, but the process is a slow one and they anticipate a multiyear delay.

The village is also planning to use ARPA funds to buy the vacant lot next to the municipal complex to build a new public safety building to house the fire and police departments. The project cost is \$20 million. The village would like to implement a regional policing option that will allow other municipalities to pay Swanton for added policing in their areas. The village currently employs 40 full-time staff.

Highgate Town Administrator Sharon Bosquet presented. Highgate is working with Swanton to expand water and sewer to the airport. The airport itself is being expanded. The runway is being extended and repaved with the intention of being a commercial cargo hub. Franklin County Field Days has been approved for use of their traditional grounds next year and they will go on a year-by-year basis with an eye towards moving to a new permanent spot.

Highgate needs more police coverage and is interested in Swanton's new region policing proposal.

Highgate has also been facing an erosion problem. Many areas in Town are situated on sand on top of clay. When it rains, the sand tends to slide off the clay. The transfer station is one such area. The town currently has a FEMA project at the station the costs approximately \$2 million. There was more damage at the site from the flooding this summer which is outside the current project area. While the municipality isn't covered under the FEMA declaration for flooding relief, they are currently appealing that decision. Machia Road is another key spot for erosion. The has potential designs from an engineer but are still deciding on whether to fix it, move it, or close it.

Highgate has a Village Core Master Plan for a property in the middle of Highgate they plan on redeveloping. A wastewater system for the property is planned and will be voted on. Housing (1-bedroom apartments for older residents) and a restaurant will most likely go there. The municipality has lots of holiday events going on, so please feel free to join in!

Future Land Use and Act 250 Delegation

C. Dimitruk reported that Vermont's RPCs were tasked with two studies as part of the Home Act that were designed to look at future land use planning. The state was looking for ways to make the plans and the process more consistent across the state. We have a few years to update plan to conform. The committee suggests the report is implemented with a close eye to equity and avoiding unintended consequences.

B. Irwin asked if this would affect municipal plans. C. Dimitruk responded that they will not have to change but will have access to the report and recommendations. There is also a recommendation at the state to shift the designation of villages and growth centers to the regional level instead of as a burden on each municipality.

The second study looked at delegating municipal Act 250 permitting groups, but there was little interest in placing additional burdens on municipalities. There was interest in delegation by equivalency in which a municipalities current criteria are considered, and if they are consistent with Act 250, then they can receive designation. C. Sawyer noted that there is a legislative interest for Act 250 reform such as getting rid of duplication and unnecessary burdens.

In regard to these studies, there are two recommendations from the PP committee.

B. Buermann motioned that we accept recommendations, C. Sawyer seconded.

K. Waite asked if C. Dimitruk is in support of the recommendations, and she responded that she is. B. Irwin noted that both recommendations center on equity and careful work to ensure equity, which is great to see. S. Jensen abstained *Motion carried.*

FY 25 Municipal Assessment Rate

K. Waite presented the Finance Committee's recommendation of a 3% increase to the municipal assessment rate which is the standard policy. It isn't a very large part of NRPC's budget, but the money is generally unencumbered and is therefore more leverageable which makes it a valuable funding source. K. Waite recommended ratifying suggestions from the finance committee.

N. Speer motioned to ratify the FY25 Municipal Assessment Rate as recommended by the Finance Committee. Y. Dandurand seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

B. Buermann noted that it's a great deal for municipalities given the support NRPC offers.

Recognition of Board and Staff

B. Irwin thanked all the staff and board members for their hard work and commitment. He formally recognizes some milestones for staff and commissioners. S. Jensen has served for 15 years. G. Brunswick and A. Adams have worked for NRPC for 20 years each. C. Dimitruk noted what a wonderful board NRPC has and how proud of the board's work she is. The group echoed their appreciation for the board, staff, and C. Dimitruk's leadership.

New NRPC Logo

C. Dimitruk reported that NRPC's traditional logo isn't working for many media situations such as online, on posters, in color, or on a small scale. K. Grenier, A. Adams, E. Adams, K. Lavoie all worked on the design of the new logo with a graphic design firm. K. Grenier led the effort and added that the final design was selected after reviewing other alternatives.

B. Buermann motioned to approve the new logo. C. Verderber seconded. Motion carried.

Commissioner Announcements

N. Speer noted he is happy to see how far the region has come and loves the fact that NRPC encourages teamwork among municipalities and within the organization.

B. Irwin thanked Brian Dubie for serving on the board.

Adjourn

B. Dubie motioned to adjourn. Y. Dandurand seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:20 pm.