

NRPC Board of Commissioners Meeting
July 29, 2026 | 6:30 p.m.
Hybrid Meeting (Zoom and St. Albans Bay Town Park)
Lake St., St. Albans Bay, VT 05481

Board Member Attendance: See attached. A quorum was present.

Staff: Catherine Dimitruk, Amy Adams, Bethany Remmers, Danielle Turin, Dean Pierce, Kyle Grenier, Lorna Peters, Nora Brown, Shaun Coleman, Isabelle Walker (intern) and Stewart Stites (intern).

Welcome, Introductions, Opening Remarks

Chair P. Zamore called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm followed by roll call and guess introductions.

Adjustments to the Agenda

None.

Opportunity for Public Comment

None.

Minutes of the June Meeting

Changes: Lines 41-42 to read “VEC meeting will be held on July 30” (not cancelled). Line 84 to read “recommends approval”. B. Buerman asked that the names of officers and representatives are listed in the minutes from now on.

E. Nance motioned to approve the June meeting minutes with amendments. W. Irwin seconded. Motion carried. One abstention.

Economic Status and Outlook

Speakers: Tayt Brooks: Secretary, Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), Tim Smith: Executive Director, Franklin County Industrial Development (FCIDC), Kendall Smith: Commissioner, Department of Labor (DOL)

Topics included: dairy industry crisis, economic challenges and job losses, lack of industrial space, cost of living, Canadian tourism decline, and economic initiatives and proposals.

An estimated 600 total job losses are anticipated due to closures and layoffs at Perrigo, Franklin Foods, and Vermont Farmers Association (VFA). This is the largest layoff event in the area since 180 jobs were lost at Energizer in 2013. Unlike 2013, current job openings in the county (~100) are insufficient to absorb the ~600 displaced workers. US Immigration office space in St. Albans also closed during the pandemic then staff have shifted from virtual to physical offices last year. This has increased commuters to Chittenden County.

Franklin County has no vacant industrial space suitable for new businesses. There are only older, larger sites like Swan Valley, Lucille Farms and Vermont Brick building are available. High costs for gas, groceries, and electricity pose difficulties for residents.

There has been a 30% decrease in Canadian visitors to Vermont, impacting Franklin County significantly (estimated 30-35% of local tourism). Factors include border closing times, processing delays, and tariffs.

The Governor has proposed project-based TIFFs (Tax Increment Financing) currently narrowed to housing (unlocked \$2 billion for infrastructure). ACCD advocates for expanding TIFFs to industrial development to support agribusiness and the dairy sector.

Capital Investment Refundable Tax Credit Program would offer tax credits or direct refunds to companies investing in machinery and equipment, even if they have no tax liability.

ACCD's is reviewing regulations affecting the dairy industry, with the goal of modernizing and updating agricultural regulations, similar to efforts in housing and community development.

Discussions are ongoing with VTrans regarding increasing weight limits for trucks hauling milk and forest products. This is currently in a research phase.

Local and Regional Development Initiatives include:

- Opportunity Zones: Designated in Montgomery and Richford. Investors can gain 30% tax savings on capital gains if properties are held for 3 years, or full capital gains savings if held for 10 years. Richford is a new addition with good potential.
- Housing Development: Developers are planning to convert Britain Academy into housing in Bakersfield.
- Catalyst Grants: RPCs and Chambers collaborate on small grants to fund feasibility studies for projects (e.g., bringing water to village cores).

Department of Labor (DOL) is working with affected companies to support ~600 impacted workers and farmers across the agricultural supply chain. DOL offers unemployment insurance, labor market information, job search assistance, resume development, and Workers' Compensation through 10-12 statewide offices. DOL is providing on-site job fairs, office hours and workshops.

Funds are available for education and training programs. NW Tech Center received a \$300,000 grant for electrical services training.

A discussion and question and answer period ensued:

- There are concerns about increased milk hauling distances and the feasibility/cost for farmers to do their own hauling.
- Beta Technologies is expanding to the former GE Aviation facility, currently occupying 40,000 sq ft. Full ramp-up is dependent on FAA certification for electric airplanes, expected in 1 to 1.5 years.
- Plans for a welcome center north of Swanton (between I-89 barrels) are progressing. New England Governors/Eastern Canadian Premiers Meeting is scheduled for August 9-10, focusing on trade and tariffs.

- Passenger Rail to Montreal: Discussions with VTrans, New York State, Amtrak, and Transport Quebec are ongoing, with Amtrak expected to issue an RFP for Central Station construction plans soon.
- Border Staffing: CBP and CBSA apps provide real-time and historical wait times at border crossings, aiding travel decisions.
- There is a need for more comprehensive economic data on the total contribution of the working landscape (forest products, agriculture) to the state's economy.
- There is a need for developing diverse affordable housing options (townhouses, starter homes) to retain families with children, rather than solely focusing on apartments.

Land Use Review Board (LURB) and Act 250

Speaker: Sarah Hadd, LURB

The LURB was reconfigured from the Natural Resources Board under Act 181 of 2024. The goal is to modernize and standardize land use review processes, especially concerning Act 250.

RPCs must have regional plans confirmed by the end of 2026. NRPC was the first to achieve confirmed plan status. The LURB issued a 77-page response to NRPC's regional plan which the LURB aims to make more concise.

Regional plan confirmation is crucial for creating Act 250 exemption areas through tiered systems. Tier 1B communities receive exemptions for up to 50 housing units in projects upon regional plan confirmation. Tier 1A offers broader delegation for both residential and commercial exemptions. Some communities are adopting a "wait and see" approach, while others are closely monitoring. Interim exemptions were extended by Act 152. The first applications are anticipated in early August, with the review process expected to take several months.

The LURB is actively guiding Tier 1A implementation and actively reviewing other regional plans. The LURB's online database is now accessible.

Act 152 (S325) is effective on July 1, 2026. It repealed the road rule, repealed Tier 3, extends temporary Act 250 exemptions for housing to 2028, and extends municipal plans expiring during this period until the end of 2027. The exception is the accessory on-farm business exemption. A report on this exemption is due to the legislature in November 2026.

The LURB acknowledged that the deadlines for regional plans preceded a robust community engagement, which may have led to "discord." A key focus for the next year is to improve communication, accessibility, and dialogue with communities. LURB members are available to local select boards and planning commissions.

S. Hadd praised NRPC for its exceptional in-person community engagement efforts, which were vital in overcoming challenges, especially in areas lacking established municipal plans or regulations. P. Zamore praised staff on the regional plan update.

FY27 Transportation Planning Initiative Work Program

Kyle provided a brief overview noting the TAC reviewed and approved the work program.

136 *B. Buerman motioned to approve the FY27 TPI Work Program. Y. Dandurand seconded. Motion*
137 *carried.*

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139 **FY27 Committee Assignments**

140 Committee assignments are included in the Board packet.

141 *Y. Dandurand motioned to approve the committee assignments. B. Young seconded. Motion*
142 *carried.*

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144 C. Dimitruk noted that committee assignments are not permanent but allow members to join later.

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146 **Other Business**

147 B. Morris emphasized the importance of representation on NRPC committees as it provides
148 valuable support and a voice for local priorities. TAC representation has been down for some time.

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150 S. Jensen emphasized the importance of TIFs.

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152 *B. Buermann motioned to adjourn. E. Nance seconded. Motion carried.*

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154 Meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m.