



LAND USE REVIEW BOARD

10 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-3201

LAND USE REVIEW BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**Pre-Application Meeting, Bennington County Regional Commission
5/29/2026, 1:30 p.m.**

Physical Location: Arlington Town Hall Upper Meeting Room, 3828 Route 7A, Arlington, Vermont.

Online Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendance (in-person or virtual)

Board Staff: Rachel Lomonaco, Rebecca Chalifoux

Public: Rachel Batterson, Zachary C. Heier, Samantha Page, Marcella Dent, Annette Smith, Nick Zaiac, Samantha Page, Callie Fishburn, Bill Colvin, Sheila Kearns, Eric Burdge, Linda Benway

A. Call to order and Board member roll call

The Land Use Review Board convened at 1:30 p.m. via In-Person and Microsoft Teams, Sarah Hadd presiding, with the following Board members in attendance:

Janet Hurley, Chair – In-person
Sarah Hadd, Vice Chair – In-person
* Brooke Dingleline – Microsoft Teams
Kirsten Sultan – In-person
Alex Weinhausen – In-person

* Brooke Dingleline recused herself from participation in the Benning County Regional Commission pre-application and application proceedings due to professional obligations. She departed the meeting at 1:31 pm.

Janet Hurley disclosed previous service as a BCRC commissioner and in BCRC employment and read a statement asserting that she had no involvement in the development of BCRC's draft plan and no current interests in the BCRC. (Her "No Conflict of Interest Disclosure" is included as Exhibit 010 on the record for this application on the Board's database:

<https://anrweb.vt.gov/ANR/Act250/RPDetail.aspx?AppNum=RPC02-0001>)

Sarah Hadd provided a brief overview of the process, noting the Board's responsibility to approve regional plans, including future land use maps, developed by the state's 11 regional planning commissions and that by December 31st of this year, all RPCS must have adopted Act 181 compliant plans. Sarah also indicated that written comments

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may also be submitted to act250.board@vermont.gov until June 8th, or thereabouts, and asked if there were any questions about the process. No questions were raised.

B. BCRC presentation including an overview of draft regional plan and a virtual tour of proposed Tier 1B areas.

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) director Bill Colvin introduced three BCRC planners (Nick Zaiac, Samantha Page and Callie Fishburn) and together they outlined its development of a new regional plan. The BCRC presentation was supported by slides (Exhibit 009 on the record for this application on the Board's database: <https://anrweb.vt.gov/ANR/Act250/RPDetail.aspx?AppNum=RPC02-0001>).

Although a regional plan was adopted in November 2024, BCRC began a new planning process in January 2025, leading to a recent pre-application submission to the Land Use Review Board. Serving 17 municipalities (14 towns and 3 villages) and about 5% of Vermont's population, BCRC undertook extensive public engagement: 30+ municipal meetings focused on Act 181, future land use mapping, and the new tiered Act 250 system; tabling at public events; library and community center displays; a survey (100+ responses); and broad outreach via a dedicated web page, local TV, news coverage, and social media. They reached 330+ people directly and held two focus groups—one with New Americans and limited-English speakers (with materials translated into Spanish and Dari), and another with youth in trades—while visiting multiple towns across the county.

Input highlighted strong public priorities for safe, high-quality, affordable housing, followed by clean water, healthy forests, and wildlife, with community strengths cited as social cohesion, public spaces, natural beauty, rural character, outdoor recreation, and proximity to major metros. Key challenges include housing affordability and availability, economic stagnation, resistance to change, poverty and homelessness, and access to essential services like healthcare. In response, BCRC structured the plan into five thematic sections plus an introductory "user guide," aligned land-use categories with Act 181, refined its housing need methodology to better support growth, and made the document more visual and user-friendly. Each chapter begins with "what we heard" from the community and ends with concrete goals, policies, and action items for BCRC, municipalities, and residents. Environmental justice considerations are integrated throughout the text, goals, and implementation matrix, with an icon calling out EJ-related content and actions.

1:52 p.m. Internet connectivity issues resulted in ±5-minutes of lost connectivity with the Teams participants and the discussion repeated itself towards ensuring that virtual participants had the benefit of all content.

BCRC created an implementation matrix at the end of the regional plan to bring all goals, policies, and actions into one place, tie each item to specific program areas, and make the work plan action-oriented. This is intended to streamline follow-through across the organization and help municipalities and partners see clear next steps.

The updated future land use map translates prior categories into Act 181's framework while retaining continuity. About 60% of the region is Rural Conservation (much of it Green Mountain National Forest), with significant agricultural areas and a smaller but pivotal share of centers and growth areas. The plan proposes one expanded Downtown Center in Bennington; 22 Village Centers in total (17 legacy plus 5 new in Woodford, Old Bennington, Sandgate, Landgrove, and a second center in Dorset); two Planned Growth Areas (Bennington and Manchester); and 14 Village Areas whose mapped extents are shaped by flood hazard and river corridor constraints. Five municipalities—Arlington, Bennington, Manchester, North Bennington, and Shaftsbury—opted into Tier 1B, with boundaries generally reflecting historic patterns, utility service areas, and environmental constraints.

Tier 1B highlights include: Arlington's coverage of both Arlington and East Arlington village centers (historic core, floodplain constraints, town-owned utilities); Bennington's largest Tier 1B area oriented around the legacy downtown, with carve-outs for large wetlands and extensions toward areas with water/wastewater service, while avoiding sprawl along PFAS-driven utility expansions; Manchester's expansion beyond its prior Neighborhood Development Area, bounded by wetlands and floodplains, with existing or planned utility service and suitable soils, excluding independent Manchester Village; North Bennington's forward-looking expansion to support housing near the college and leverage its village-owned utilities; and Shaftsbury's opt-in for South Shaftsbury and the village area tied to North Bennington's system, but not for the historic center lacking utilities and surrounded by conserved farmland. Housing targets were set by finalizing the FLU map, allocating a substantial majority to centers/growth areas, and proportionally distributing the remainder by area, using 2030 low/high targets and the 2050 low scenario due to anticipated wastewater and fiscal constraints. The resulting targets align with infrastructure capacity, concentrating the largest shares in Bennington and Manchester and smaller shares in less-served towns.

C. Questions from Board members and observations from the site visits.

Board members and BCRC staff recapped a morning of site visits from Dorset to Manchester, Arlington, Shaftsbury, Bennington, and back up Route 7, then discussed how on-the-ground observations informed mapping choices. In Manchester, two areas were highlighted within the planned growth area: a prospective 802 Homes partnership near the town offices and the "Airport Rd" site, ultimately mapped as PGA due to planned utilities, bike/ped investments, and housing intent. In Dorset, a new South Dorset Village Center reflects extensive town work at the Raptor Lane property (new town offices, trail network, housing plans), with mapping focused on developable lower portions. Bennington's downtown expansion aims to encompass major civic and institutional anchors (e.g., state facilities, veterans' home, high school). Staff also noted cross-boundary village dynamics—e.g., the North Bennington/Shaftsbury and East Arlington/Sunderland areas—where municipal borders don't neatly match village "feel," and Tier 1B participation varies by town capacity.

Q&A explored why some developed parcels were mapped as PGA or Transition: Manchester's airstrip area and the Bennington Country Club were included in PGA to preserve reuse options where utilities and planning exist. Dorset's village-area expansions were tied to water service and recent bylaw updates enabling mixed-use and multifamily, with a broader plan update expected soon. Several mappings differ across river corridors (e.g., Arlington, North Bennington, Pownal) due to flood and river constraints despite neighborhood contiguity and water/sewer availability; in Pownal, pedestrian links across bridges are limited but conceptual improvements exist. Shaftsbury's built-out center seeks incremental infill once wastewater solutions are in place, alongside potential reuse of civic buildings; an undeveloped tract near Holiday Dr/Sycamore Ln also offers potential. Bennington College's campus was split between village area (North Bennington) and rural general (Bennington) to avoid leapfrog development away from the village. Board members asked BCRC to clarify flood-hazard treatment within PGAs (infill exceptions) and consider clearer overlays or use of Transition/Infill where appropriate.

Housing targets assume a substantial share of ADUs—especially in sewer-limited areas—to support intergenerational living and leverage modular/offsite construction; Bennington's forthcoming bylaw updates should ease ADU creation, and a local financing pilot saw strong demand. The implementation matrix was intentionally simplified (actions, program areas, EJ flags), with actionable chapter-level “how BCRC can help” elements; the Board suggested adding indicators for top public priorities (e.g., housing). On classification, Manchester Center was mapped as a “Center” rather than “Downtown” due to designation-program considerations and the absence of a downtown organization, though it appears to function as a downtown under FLU definitions; BCRC is open to revisiting. Additional consistency points included Bennington PGA edges (East Rd included where walkability/utilities are feasible; areas isolated by Route 279 mapped Transition), and why some industrial/solar sites (e.g., Arlington's Mac Molding, a Pownal Route 7 solar field) were mapped Transition to reflect redevelopment potential contingent on utilities or evolving conservation plans rather than Enterprise.

D. Questions and comments from state partner agencies and the public

There were no comments from state partner agencies. Marcella Dent from the Vermont Agency of Transportation indicated she did not have any questions or comments at this time.

Eric Burdge asked whether approving and rezoning maps will limit the state's role in development review by predesignating growth areas—and, if not, questioned the purpose of creating predetermined development maps. Sarah Hadd explained that mapping future land use areas is the first step under Act 181, after which municipalities may choose to opt into Tier 1B (and later Tier 1A) for eligible growth areas—subject to plan approval and Board confirmation—gaining benefits such as exempting up to 50 housing units from Act 250. Janet Hurley indicated that the municipal review is equivalent to Act 250, basically the same standards, and that Tier 1A hasn't been approved yet because it requires an approved and confirmed regional plan (applications

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are expected later this summer), and pending legislation (S.325) may modify some requirements without changing the Tier 1A/1B concept.

Sarah Hadd outlined next steps: the public comment period is closing soon (submit comments via the form or email act250.board@vermont.gov) and the Board will be developing a written response. As this is a pre-application review, BCRC is invited to attend future public Board meetings to ask questions while finalizing its application, with the Board striving to balance multiple applications. All pre-application materials and partner/public comments are available on the database (<https://anrweb.vt.gov/ANR/Act250/RPDefault.aspx>). Search for the Bennington County Regional Plan application to see all exhibits and submissions.

E. Adjourn/Recess

Motion: to Adjourn.

By: Kirsten Sultan

Second: Janet Hurley

Voting Board members

Janet Hurley, Chair - Aye

Sarah Hadd, Vice Chair - Aye

Brooke Dingleline - Absent

Kirsten Sultan - Aye

Alex Weinhausen - Aye

Result: **Motion approved, unanimous**

Meeting ended at 3:41 p.m.