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Southern Vermont CEDS 2023 Vital Projects Announced

Projects focus on building community and strengthening infrastructure



The Bennington High School redevelopment, which will return a historic cornerstone property to use after 20 years of vacancy, has been selected as one of Southern Vermont's ten "Vital Projects" for 2023.

Even for those who are deeply involved in the life of their community, it can be difficult to keep up with all the good work happening across Southern Vermont. Every year, Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) issue a call for local organizations and community leaders to let us know what projects they are working on – and to highlight how those projects align with our region’s development goals.

These development goals are outlined in the Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a federally approved five-year action plan for growing our regional economy. Our current CEDS was developed in 2019 with a wide range of community input, and prioritizes actions that result in a community that is welcoming, forward-thinking, and healthy. (Read more about the CEDS and the specific objectives at sovermontzone.com/ceds.)

Each year, a community review committee reads all project submissions and selects ten to be named our region’s “Vital Projects”; whether selected as a vital project or not, all submitted projects become an official part of our CEDS, which can then boost their visibility and eligibility for funding.

The committee reviewed a record-breaking 97 projects from municipalities, businesses, and non-profit organizations across the two-county region, meeting in Wilmington to complete a final project review and select ten vital projects. Despite the hundreds of pages of materials the committee had to review, the committee dove in wholeheartedly and really enjoyed the process. “It’s been inspiring to see all the work happening in our region,” noted Anna Bowler, of Brattleboro Solar Management.

The selected Vital Projects include large workforce programs and infrastructure improvements to those with a more targeted impact on a single community, such as the redevelopment of the old Bennington High School building and a playground for a low-income housing community.

“Surveys show that a lot of kids don’t think they matter to their communities, and that only increases as they enter high school,” noted review committee member James Salerno of Hale Mountain Research. “The LedgeWood Heights playground is a critical youth project with an imminent funding gap. Investing in youth will help keep them here and engaged in the community over the long term.”

The committee offers its thanks and appreciation to all the organizations that submitted projects, and its congratulations to those receiving Vital Project designation. BDCC and BCRC invite all community members to look for opportunities to give input into the next CEDS, which will be developed in early 2024.

The following list of Southern Vermont CEDS 2023 Vital Projects is presented in alphabetical order by project name.

Project: Alice Holway Drive Homes

Impact Region: A Single Town in the Windham Region

Submitting Organization: Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

Description: The Alice Holway Drive development will be two new buildings that will provide 25 mixed-income, highly energy efficient, and accessible apartments in Putney's village center. The development will provide community space with a kitchenette and has been designed to accommodate existing community gardens and the Putney Farmers Market on the land. The proposed community meets smart-growth principles by creating more homes in the designated neighborhood development area, is immediately accessible to public transportation, and connects with the walkable infrastructure of the town, while also providing homes at an accessible rent to local wages with access to green space.

Project: Bellows Falls Intermodal Transportation Center

Impact Region: Multiple Towns in the Windham Region

Submitting Organization: Town of Rockingham

Description: The 1923 Bellows Falls Union Station, a contributing structure on the National Register and an active intercity bus and rail station, is dilapidating and no longer part of the business plan for the owner (Vermont Rail System), with no access to grant funding for a multimillion-dollar rehab and preservation project. The town will purchase the station, remediate the lead and asbestos, repair and restore the brick facade, doors and windows and canopies, and renovate all the mechanical, HVAC, plumbing, electrical systems. VTrans and Amtrak are improving/restoring the intercity passenger rail platform. Feasibility options include a town master lease to Local Development Corp LLC for tax credits and leased space to passenger travel related businesses like a nanobrewery or localvore teaching restaurant.

Project: Bennington High Redevelopment Project

Impact Region: A Single Town in Bennington County

Submitting Organization: Hale Resources LLC

Description: At the crossroads of history and modernity lies the Benn High Redevelopment Project, a public-private initiative with an ambitious vision to transform the historic Bennington High School building into a vibrant community hub. This partnership between the Town of Bennington and Hale Resources LLC is on a mission to redevelop the 100,000 square-foot structure, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, into a blend of perpetually affordable housing, workforce housing, commercial space, and a community center. The town's decision to allocate \$2.5M of local ARPA funding towards Benn High underlines the project's vital role in addressing community needs. This initiative stands at the forefront of plans to provide essential housing and foster community engagement.

Project: Creating Infrastructure for a Regional Food System

Impact Region: Southern Vermont

Submitting Organization: Food Connects

Description: As a social enterprise, Food Connect's priority is to increase access to source-identified regional foods for wholesale customers like schools while also maximizing returns for farmers and food producers across New England. We do that by operating as efficiently as possible while keeping our margins below industry standards to keep the price points competitive. We have outgrown our space and need to add infrastructure to match our projected growth. Our sales have doubled year over year since 2019, and 2023 sales through

August 31st are 35% above 2022. For the last two years, we have been searching for a new space, one that will meet our growing demands and serve as a long-term home.

Project: Ledgewood Heights Playground

Impact Region: Southern Vermont

Submitting Organization: Brattleboro Housing Opportunities Inc

Description: Ledgewood Heights is a 41-unit family neighborhood of Brattleboro Housing Partnerships with 80 to 100 youngsters. A few years ago, the deteriorated playground had to be removed for safety reasons. Now there is no area for healthy outdoor activities, so they are playing unsafely in the road and parking areas. It may seem that a federal agency should have the capital for a project like this, but the reality is that we do not. Residents' rent is 30% of their income (and all are very low income). After capital expenses, utilities, maintenance, etc., there is little left. Recently we also incurred funding for replacement housing for flooded Melrose Terrace and creating the flood mitigation area. Our project is simply to fund and build a playground for the children.

Project: Pipelines and Pathways Program

Impact Region: Windham Region

Submitting Organization: Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Description: As we enter our sixth year, Pipelines and Pathways is going strong in all Windham County High Schools. The program exposes students to the wide variety of employment and educational opportunities available in our region, provides training that all students need to take their first successful steps into the professional world, and works to ensure that every senior graduates with a solid plan for postsecondary success, whether college or workforce-bound.

Project: SEVT Brattleboro Bus Facility

Impact Region: Southeast Vermont Transit

Submitting Organization: Southern Vermont

Description: SEVT serves 35 communities in southern Windsor and Windham Counties in Vermont and four in New Hampshire. We provide rides out of our Brattleboro location not only within Brattleboro, but also throughout Windham County. We lease space now that is unpaved, outdoors, and has no fuel or washing components. We need a permanent facility that will allow us to sustain and grow our service in the region. Our vision is to construct an indoor vehicle storage and operations facility in the Brattleboro Industrial Park for 10+ vehicles of all sizes, with storage, washing, fueling, and an administrative office.

Project: Southern VT Flood Mitigation Plan

Impact Region: Southern Vermont

Submitting Organization: Vermont River Conservancy

Description: Following Tropical Storm Irene, communities, nonprofits, and state leaders met to determine how to make the next floods less damaging. From this, the top priority projects are floodplain protection and restoration efforts. These are small to large-scale projects that create space for rivers to naturally overflow onto undeveloped land to slow water, drop debris, and ultimately keep downstream homes, businesses, roads, and other infrastructure safer during

floods. VRC is working with communities across southern Vermont to identify and implement these types of flood mitigation projects.

Project: Tri-Park Master Plan Projects

Impact Region: A Single Town in the Windham Region

Submitting Organization: Tri-Park Cooperative Housing Corporation

Description: The Cooperative partnered with the Windham Regional Commission and the Town of Brattleboro to develop a Master Plan and is now beginning to implement the identified projects. Most significantly, Tri-Park is developing a \$7.4M project to help 26 residents move into new homes outside of the flood hazard area. A \$1.1M project to replace the sewer systems at Black Mountain and Glen Parks has finalized design and permitting and is headed for construction. The Master Plan also includes repairing two bridges and upgrading electrical infrastructure, paving repairs at all three parks, and investments in stormwater management improvements.

Project: Welcoming Communities

Impact Region: Southern Vermont

Submitting Organization: Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Description: Welcoming Communities is a Windham County focused initiative that partners with employers and regional service providers to increase the retention, recruitment, and success of BIPOC and foreign-born residents and workers and includes citizen and non-citizen workers. The BDCC and partners continue to convene housing partners, transportation providers, employers, service providers, and community volunteers regularly in support of developing regional infrastructure to support asylees, refugees, humanitarian parolees, and other in-migrants to Southern Vermont. In large part due to this work, 2021 marked the opening of a new refugee resettlement field office in Brattleboro through a partnership with the Ethiopian Community Development Council, a national refugee resettlement agency based in Virginia. To-date, Southern Vermont has welcomed over 200 New Vermonters, the majority of whom continue to call SoVT home. New Vermonters engaged in our programming have an average wage of \$18.15/hour, and continue to pursue additional credentials, learning opportunities, and other investments that yield greater upward mobility. We've launched innovative training and credentialing opportunities in CDL and Early Childhood Education, and have driven policy changes statewide at the DMV, Agency of Transportation, and the State Nursing Board.

2023 Southern Vermont CEDS Projects (alphabetical by project name)

1786 Rupert Meetinghouse Project - Congregational Church of Rupert, VT

A New Home for Vermont Paws & Boots - Vermont Paws & Boots, Inc.

Alice Holway Drive Homes - Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

Arlington Common - Arlington Arts and Enrichment Program

Athens Community Center - Town of Athens

Athens Town Garage - Town of Athens

BCRC College Connections Internship Program - Bennington County Regional Commission

BDCC Business Park Application - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

BDCC Lending - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

BEEC Farmhouse Restoration - Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center (BEEC)

Bellows Falls Area Wide Plan - Town Of Rockingham

Bellows Falls Intermodal Transportation Center (BFITC) formerly BF Historic Train Station Purchase and Renovation - Town of Rockingham (TOR)

Bellows Falls Opera House Lower Theater and Main Theater improvements - Town of Rockingham

Benn High Redevelopment Project - Hale Resources LLC

Bennington Community Market - Bennington Community Market

Bennington County Health Equity Collaborative - Bennington County Regional Commission

Bennington Rail Trail - Town of Bennington

Bennington Rescue Squad Mentorship Program - Bennington Rescue Squad

Bennington Town Plan Update: Phase 1 - Bennington County Regional Commission

BFADC - Robertson Paper Site - Seeking Developer/Tenant(s) - Facility scoping, predevelopment, permitting, D&E, and Construction - Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation (BFADC)

Blake Higgins Dam Removal, Saxtons River Restoration - Connecticut River Conservancy

Brattleboro Microtransit Pilot - Southeast Vermont Transit

CDL (Commercial Driver's License) / CLP (Commercial License Permit) Bootcamp - BDCC

Community Assessment and Project Prioritization/CAPP (TEST) - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Compost Facility Expansion - Windham Solid Waste Management District

Cotton Mill Expansion - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Creating Infrastructure for a Regional Food System - Food Connects

Creating Supply for Local Embroidery Demand - Evergreen Alterations LLC

Creative Sector Hub - High Street & Green, LLC

DeWitt Block Housing Redevelopment - Community Development Support, Inc.

Dosa Kitchen market and facility expansion - Dosa Kitchen

Dover & Wilmington Bi-Town Strategic Marketing Plan - Southern Vermont Deerfield Valley Chamber of Commerce

DVFiber - Deerfield Valley Communications Union District

Energizer Facility Reuse - Town of Bennington

Estey Organ Complex Redevelopment - Community Development Support Inc.

Extension of Valley Flyer Rail Service to Brattleboro and Bellows Falls. - VTrans

Flood Hazard Mitigation in Jacksonville Village - Town of Whitingham

Food Center and Farm Store at Retreat Farm - Retreat Farm, LTD

Get On Board SoVT - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Governor Hunt House Community Center - Friends of Vernon Center, Inc.

Grace Cottage Family Health Primary Care Clinic Upgrade - Carlos G. Otis Health Care Center, dba Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital

Greater Rockingham Area Services Energy Improvements - Greater Rockingham Area Services

Green Island Project - Great Falls Food Hub - Town of Rockingham

Halifax Community Hall Solar System - Integrated Solar

Heat Pump Distribution and Education - Delta Energy Works

Hinsdale Brattleboro Island Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge - Windham Regional Commission

Imtec Lane and Industrial Park Stormwater Planning, Design, and Implementation - Town of Rockingham

Industrial Park Expansion - BDCC

In-Sight Photography Project Career Pathways - In-Sight Photography Project

Island St Revitalization - Town of Rockingham (TOR) and Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation (BFADC)

it's our turnip [the Farmers Market @wundorwoven] - wundorwoven

John G. McCullough Free Library 2023- 2026 Strategic Plan - John G. McCullough Free Library

Keene Brattleboro Transit Study - Southwest New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission

Latchis Arts Theatre Project - Latchis Arts

Learning Employment Academic Program - Brattleboro Housing Opportunities Inc for Brattleboro Housing Partnerships

Ledgewood Heights Playground - Brattleboro Housing Opportunities Inc

Library ADA upgrades including building and grounds - South Londonderry Free Library

Londonderry Snowboard Museum - Community Fund for Londonderry VT, Inc.

Manchester Sewer Line Extension - Town of Manchester

Miss Bellows Falls Diner - Rockingham for Progress

Neighborhood Roots Community Farm and Gardens - Neighborhood Roots Food Collective Inc

Ninja Path - Bennington County Regional Commission

Nonprofit Coworking Space - Community Development Support, Inc.

Old School Community Center - Old School Enrichment Council, Inc.

Pipelines and Pathways Program - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Potash Hill - Potash Hill, Inc.

Pownal Community Center - Town of Pownal

Putnam Block Redevelopment - Phase 2: Mount Anthony House - Putnam Community Health LLC

Queer Bratt - Switch Bratt co-op

Refugee Rental Assistance Program project - Bennington County Open Arms

Renovating Putney's Historic Town Hall - Town of Putney

Rich Earth Institute's Urine Nutrient Reclamation Program (UNRP) - Rich Earth Institute

Route 30 Mixed Use Path - VTrans

Route 30 Public Transit Service - Southeast Vermont Transit

Route 9 Water & Wastewater Infrastructure Expansion Project - Town of Wilmington

SEVT Brattleboro Bus Facility - Southeast Vermont Transit

Southern Vermont Communications Union District - Southern Vermont Communications Union District

Southern VT Flood Mitigation Plan - Vermont River Conservancy

SUSU commUNITY farm: Deepening & Widening our Impact - SUSU commUNITY farm

The Putney Place - The Pumpkin Patch

TLR and Wyman Flint Master plan BF Greater Island District and FERC - Town of Rockingham (TOR) and Sustainable Valley Group (SVG)

Town of Rockingham - Adams Grist Mill - Town of Rockingham and Bellows Falls Historical Society (BFHS)

Trails and Outdoor Recreation - Walk-Bike-Safety Plan - Town of Rockingham

Tri-Park Master Plan Projects - Tri Park Cooperative Housing Corporation

Vermont Employment Pathfinder - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Vilas Bridge Rehabilitation - Town of Rockingham

Wardsboro Village Center project - Wardsboro Village Center Committee

Welcoming Communities - Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

West River Trail Improvements - Windham Regional Commission

WheelPad L3C - Wheel Pad L3C

Whitingham Sewer Infrastructure - Town of Whitingham

Wilder Memorial Library Renovation & Expansion Project - Wilder Memorial Library

Windham Cultural Plan - Vermont Creative Network, Southern Zone

Windham Region Infrastructure Characterization: Developing a Town-Level, Region-Wide Understanding of Actions Necessary to Address Infrastructure Limitations to Support Economic and Community Development - Windham Regional Commission

Winston Prouty Campus Development Project - Winston Prouty Center

Workforce Center of Excellence - BDCC

CEDS Project Review Committee: BDCC and BCRC staff brought together twelve community and business leaders from across the region to review, rank, and discuss the 97 project submissions. This year's committee: Andrea Bacchi, Think Dynamic Digital; Anna Bowler, Brattleboro Solar Management; Michael Corey, Bennington College; Mike Cutler, CAT-TV; J. Violet Gannon, Greenway Institute; Linda Gifkins, Town of Wardsboro; Camille Kauffman, Paran Recreations; Patrick McAllister, Town of Halifax; James Salerno, Hale Mountain Research;

Timothy Stys, Readsboro General Store; Kate Traeger, Brattleboro Gallery Walk; Betsy Thurston, Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance



The 2023 CEDS Project Review Committee. Pictured left to right: Camille Kauffman, Michael Corey, J. Violet Gannon, Timothy Stys, James Salerno, Linda Gifkins, Patrick McAllister, Anna Bowler, Betsy Thurston, and Kate Traeger. Not pictured: Andrea Bacchi and Mike Cutler.

The 2019 Southern Vermont CEDS is the five-year federally recognized regional economic development plan which the public and private sectors collaborated to create. A CEDS must be the result of an ongoing economic development planning process, developed with broad-based and diverse public and private sector participation, and must include a section listing all suggested projects. A CEDS also contains a section identifying and prioritizing vital projects, programs and activities that address the region's greatest needs or that will best enhance the region's competitiveness. Progress on all the goals and projects will be updated annually. The 2019 Southern Vermont CEDS can be found here: <https://www.vermontzone.com/ceds>. BDCC and BCRC are the lead regional agencies for the 2019 Southern Vermont CEDS and the region's standing CEDS Committee consists of members of the Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies and Regional Economic Development Working Group (see below).

Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) is a private, nonprofit economic development organization with the mission of investing in the drivers of the regional economy so that people, businesses, and communities in Southern Vermont can thrive. BDCC serves as the State of Vermont's certified Regional Development Corporation (RDC) for the greater Windham County area (including Windham County and the towns of Readsboro, Searsburg, Winhall and Weston). BDCC is one of 12 RDCs throughout Vermont. BDCC activity is made possible in part by a grant from the State of Vermont through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. For more information visit: <https://brattleborodevelopment.com/>

Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) was created by the seventeen towns and villages it serves and works on behalf of those municipalities to build strong, resilient and sustainable communities, to foster economic prosperity, and to promote a high quality of life for residents of the region. For more information visit www.bcrvt.org.

Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) is an affiliate of BDCC that grew from a 2008 grassroots effort, initiated by BDCC, to understand and create long term strategies needed to reverse the economic decline of the Windham Region and plan for the economic impacts from the closure of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. In 2014, after multiple years of regional input, education and data gathering, SeVEDS received federal approval for the Windham Region's federally recognized S.M.A.R.T. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). SeVEDS partnered with Bennington's Regional Economic Development Group in 2018 to develop the 2019 Southern Vermont Zone CEDS. For more information visit: www.seveds.com

The Regional Economic Development Working Group (RED Group) is a volunteer body committed to increasing the shared prosperity and quality of life for the seventeen municipalities in southwestern Vermont. The group has a diverse membership that reflects the varied community, business, workforce, and demographic characteristics of the region. The RED Group focuses on the internal and external economic development issues that affect the Bennington County region as a whole; the regional implications of local economic development issues; the process of regional economic development from local, state, and federal perspectives; and options for future initiatives.