

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor John Hollar, City Council members, City Manager Bill Fraser
Montpelier Planning Commission members, Planning & Development Director Gwen Hallsmith

From: Tina Ruth, member, Montpelier Planning Commission (MPC)
Montpelier representative to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC)

Re: Proposed consolidation of CVRPC and the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation
(CVEDC)

Date: May 2, 2013

In preparation for the May 8, 2013 Montpelier City Council meeting discussion of the proposed consolidation of CVRPC and CVEDC, I have enclosed the following:

1. email of April 15, 2013, from Laurie Emery, CVRPC Office Manager, with attachments:
 - a. Final Report of the Joint Committee on Consolidation, April 10, 2013,
 - b. Proposed Bylaws of Central Vermont Regional Commission,
 - c. Statement of the Joint Committee on Consolidation Member David Strong, and
 - d. Memo of October 16, 2012, to Josh Fitzhugh, et al., from Paul Gillies, RE: Ideas on the merger of CVRPC and CVEDC, Second Draft
2. Comments and Questions: Final Report of the Joint Committee on Consolidation (April 10, 2013), prepared by Laura Hill-Eubanks, Representative, CVRPC
3. Reasons for Recommending Against Consolidation, by Tina Ruth, April 29, 2013, approved by the Montpelier Planning Commission, 4.29.13.
4. CVRPC Statement and List of Services
5. Statutory bases for regional planning commissions and for regional development corporations.

A little background information:

Toward the end of the Douglas administration, the Challenges for Change effort to streamline and make more efficient state government originally included a suggestion, later dropped, that RPCs and EDCs serving similar geographic regions might consider merging. Some members of CVRPC and CVEDC were interested, and a joint committee made up of 3 members of each began looking into it.

About a year and a half ago, in November or December, 2011, CVRPC and CVEDC held a joint meeting to hear a presentation by Steve Patterson, Executive Director of NVDA, the Northeast Vermont Development Association. NVDA is the only joint regional development and planning body in VT. It began as a development organization, and added planning later.

A month or two later, early in 2012, the joint committee proposed that both bodies vote to co-locate and consolidate. They even picked out an office space for the new entity, the building in Barre owned by Mayor Thomas Lauzon that burned and was being renovated, on the corner of Elm and North Main Streets.

At that time, I reported to the MPC, whose members suggested a number of questions to raise at the next CVRPC meeting. I also consulted with Gwen Hallsmith and then-Assistant City Manager, Bev Hill. The consensus was that there were many unanswered questions, that if regionalization were to be seriously desired more regional entities should be considered, and that a vote on consolidation was very premature.

Montpelier was loath to lose 8-10 employees of both organizations and a major downtown tenant (CVRPC; CVEDC is located at National Life); MPC and CVRPC work very closely together and have actually shared VISTA employees; and CVRPC's location near the State House is very useful when planning issues arise unexpectedly in the State House and a response is needed quickly.

Among the unresolved issues were the very different legal bases of the two organizations, how one organization would serve their very different primary clients (RPCs serve primarily municipalities, and the region and the state, doing the work that counties might do if ours were strong and huge work statewide in transportation and disaster relief in the aftermath of Irene, for instance, while EDCs serve existing and potential businesses, and the region and the state), staffing an organization in need of expertise in both planning and development, the size and make-up of the board, etc.

A CVRPC meeting in early 2012 held to consider the consolidation proposal was attended by many people from member municipalities who were not present members of CVRPC, who expressed concerns similar to those mentioned above, emphasizing concern about whether municipalities would continue to receive from a consolidated organization the essential planning services they depend on from CVRPC. For many rural towns without any professional planning staff, CVRPC staff are their planners.

They also pointed out that CVRPC originally in 1967 had 5 at large members: the chamber of commerce, an agriculture seat, the League of Women Voters, and two others. In the 1980's they were eliminated, not because of any crisis or single issue, but because the statutory municipal representatives felt their voice was being diluted. An attempt in the 90's to reinstate at large members failed.

The proposed motion to consolidate did not succeed, and it was agreed to appoint a new

Joint committee consisting of 5 members from each body, with staff help from each and a budget. The new joint committee would study the issues in much more depth, taking the time they needed to do so.

The new committee worked diligently, meeting twice a month for about a year. Notes of their meetings were furnished to all CVRPC and CVEDC members and to CVRPC member municipalities as well.

The Final Report of the Joint Committee on Consolidation sets forth its argument for merger, with appendices containing related documents and to the Joint Committee's credit, David Strong's statement in opposition. My statement of Reasons for Recommending Against Consolidation is not an attempt to be a balanced statement. It calls to your attention a number of issues that convince me that the case for consolidation has not been made. My statement was unanimously approved by the 6 members of MPC who were present at the second meeting in this past month at which we discussed the matter. One member had to leave early to return to work and was not present for the vote.

I am sure you will give due consideration to all the arguments, and I hope you will direct me as your representative on CVRPC to vote against consolidation.