

Governor Scott's Proposed Investment of American Recovery Plan funds
What does it mean for my community?
April 5, 2021

Introduction:

- The ARPA funds offer a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address challenges in Vermont.
- Towns are ready to leverage this funding to pursue economic development, invest in wastewater infrastructure, activate climate change priorities, respond to the housing crisis, and bolster broadband and cell service.
- Throughout the last decade, countless communities across Vermont have come together to host conversations and brainstorming processes to form a vision for the future of their towns. They turned these visions into tangible plans and shovel-ready projects designed to boost the local economy, help residents thrive, attract new families to the area, and combat the effects of climate change.
- The future they have been planning for has arrived.
- Here are some ways we can invest in their collective vision.

Wastewater Infrastructure

- More than 150 small towns and villages in Vermont lack sewer systems and community water infrastructure. These towns desperately need the underground infrastructure in place so they can solve the issues that address above ground.
- Community wastewater systems and community drinking water infrastructure are the foundations upon which everything else relies on. If we want to accelerate economic development, support new affordable housing, retrofit existing housing stock, tackle mounting climate change concerns, support local entrepreneurs, attract new residents, and boost broadband and cell service, we must first prioritize water and wastewater projects.
- These underground capital investments are the literal foundation for which every above-ground activity depends on.
- Besides maintaining the value of village properties and providing important public health and water quality benefits, water and wastewater solutions help promote business expansion; redevelopment of underused and abandoned properties; housing options; and community gathering places.
- Many communities are already prepared to move forward with these systems. They just need the capital to proceed.
- **For example**, when it comes to attracting and retaining more young people and families in Vermont, a \$30M investment in village wastewater has the power to help several towns across the state, including **Montgomery**.
- After an expansive community visioning session, the town of **Montgomery** came together to figure out how they might combat declining birthrates, youth flight and an aging population.
- Initially, the community identified affordable housing and repurposing vacant buildings into multi-use spaces as a critical need. However, they quickly discovered the housing crisis they were facing could not be addressed until the town installed community-scale wastewater infrastructure.
- **Montgomery** has been working with the Agency of Natural Resources' Village Wastewater Initiative team to develop alternative wastewater solutions to help revitalize their village.
- Investing in village wastewater also has the power to transform entire regions. In **Burke**, residents are eager to see village revitalization, new businesses including restaurants and bars in

their village centers, and increased access to affordable housing. However, water and sewer capacity limit the ability to grow in **East Burke** and deeply undermine the restoration of historic buildings in **West Burke**.

- If wastewater capacity could increase through a village wastewater system, the communities could also pursue other economic development plans, including a business incubator and a maker's space to attract businesses to the town, encourage local entrepreneurs, and boost **Burke's** economic future.
- Wastewater systems are also critical for agricultural development. For generations, Vermont has crafted a strong local identity and national brand around outstanding local food systems, resourceful agricultural entrepreneurs, and value-added products like maple syrup and cheese.
- Yet, increasingly, a major barrier to local farmers looking to scale up their operations is wastewater limitations.
- Being able to fund wastewater expansion will help the agricultural sector (do these things, creating these types of positive economic and social impacts).
- Vermont Livestock in **Ferrisburgh** is looking to construct a meat processing facility and has the \$3.5M ready to fund this project but needs wastewater infrastructure in the form of more developed sewer allocations to build this facility and scale up.
- The plans include upgrading its equipment and infrastructure to support more farmers and producers. When completed the plant said it could increase its output by 40% to 50%. Recently Vermont Livestock was informed that Middlebury will no longer take blood from their blood tank. They don't know of any alternative yet. This type of challenge is not unique to Vermont Livestock. Vermont has a number of niche industries – from meat and dairy processing to distilleries and breweries – that generate high strength waste.
- The need for more sophisticated wastewater infrastructure is not simply limited to small towns in Vermont. Adequate treatment of these high strength wastes is a challenge for even our largest municipalities.
- Helping towns of all sizes invest in pretreatment systems will allow Vermont communities to incubate food sector startups including breweries and distilleries.
- Funding pretreatment allows these new or prospective businesses manage high strength wastewater that otherwise would overwhelm the town's wastewater treatment facility.
- Adequate pretreatment is a necessary precursor to expansion for many of these enterprises.
- The Town of **Hinesburg** hosts multiple breweries that are growing and looking to expand. Hinesburg has worked to upgrade their wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) to meet water quality concerns but has limited capacity to allow for further expansion. Breweries produce high strength waste that can overwhelm the WWTF. By investing critical ARPA funding in pretreatment of effluent from these types of facilities, Hinesburg can keep user rates low, enable economic development, and ensure water quality standards are maintained.
- New businesses or affordable housing units are not able to move into village centers due to the lack of sewer and drinking water availability. These new businesses or housing units are then forced to move into more urban areas, further hollowing out the heart of Vermont's rural communities.

Economic Development

- **Hardwick** is an example of a town that has spent years thinking about how to leverage capital infrastructure projects to revitalize the town's center and accelerate the local agricultural economy.

- The town has worked with local organizations, businesses in the area, and economic development groups to reimagine a future for the historic Yellow Barn as an innovative hub for working lands focused on food, agriculture and sustainable forestry.
- The town and supporting partners are ready to move forward with a \$1.03M renovation of the Yellow Barn to transform the site into a state-of-the-art facility that combines one of **Hardwick's** historic structures with a new business accelerator campus for the farm-and-food-based economy.
- This site would be home to a two-story, 40,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose processing facility and an innovative adaptive reuse of the historic 3,400 sq. ft. yellow barn – an iconic structure along the Route 15 gateway to downtown **Hardwick**.
- The Yellow Barn will strengthen Vermont's farm- and food-based economy by allowing multiple establishments to grow and expand with other entrepreneurs, develop new products, and improve export to external markets. There are two anchor tenants: The Cellars at Jasper Hill and Cabot. Jasper Hill will age cheese in the new facility, and Cabot will operate a retail destination in the historic barn, which is located on the **Lamoille Valley Rail Trail**, offering a valuable nexus with Vermont's rapidly emerging recreation-trail economy.
- A similar project in **Rutland** - the Vermont Farmers Food Center - has a plan for a \$2M project to repurpose 3 acres to build a food hub. Organizers want to create, develop and sustain two main projects. The two facilities would create a food hub and market branded "The Heart of Vermont Agriculture." Projects like this would create opportunities for farmer and value-added food entrepreneurs throughout Rutland, Bennington, and Addison counties.
- This region lacks key infrastructure to support its farmers and producers. The Vermont Farmers Food Center has a detailed business plan and is ready to take the next step with adequate funding.

Climate Resiliency

- Significant investments are needed to reduce Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions and enhance our resilience to a changing climate. A significant portion of the state's greenhouse gas emissions come from residential and commercial heating.
- Building weatherization is a cornerstone of Vermont's efforts to improve the energy efficiency of residential, institutional and commercial buildings. The Home Weatherization Assistance Program provides no cost weatherization services to Vermonters with low incomes.
- An additional \$18m would allow the State to significantly expand low-income weatherization incentives, resulting in approximately 900 incremental units being weatherized before the end of 2024.
- The additional investment and extension of the implementation timeline will also help ensure the full benefits of investments to develop a "weatherization workforce development" are realized.
- The ARPA funds would help weatherization organizations across the state, including southwestern Vermont's **BROC Community Action** team, an organization serving **Rutland and Bennington** Counties. Currently, **BROC Community Action** employs and trains crew technicians, energy auditors, an energy efficiency coach and more to help seniors on fixed incomes, families who receive fuel assistance to heat their homes, and others to apply for home weatherization services.
- With additional ARPA funds, BROC Community Action could increase the assistance it offers people in southwestern Vermont, from energy audits to insulation and air sealing.
- Supporting sustainable outdoor recreation is another way to support climate resiliency. The global pandemic has highlighted Vermont's reputation as a national outdoor recreation

destination. More Americans have turned to outdoor recreation activities during COVID19 than they have in recent history, many for the first time.

- Much like the work of the Green Mountain Club in 1912 to build not only the Long Trail but the amenities to support its use, this is an opportunity to invest in expanding and creating recreational destinations that will keep Vermont on the minds of active travelers for the next 100 years.
- Funding major outdoor recreation projects will enhance and expand access, better connect outdoor recreation areas with their host communities, improve amenities needed to support usage, and provide climate-friendly transportation bike-ped infrastructure.
- **Londonderry** is an example of a town working to improve walkability and zero-emission transportation options to connect the north and south village, which are not currently connected through walkable paths and streetscapes. There is an opportunity to reposition commerce and outdoor recreation through paths connecting their villages.
- \$15M to expand the availability of Bike-Ped grants would support the development and expansion of safe and convenient facilities for alternative transportation opportunities and improve access and safety for people walking and/or bicycling through simple physical improvements like on-road bicycle lanes and wide shoulders, sidewalks, and pedestrian signals.
- **Springfield** is another place hungry to foster economic development and outdoor recreation opportunities. The town has a final Main Street Master Plan that provides a vision and guide for improvements to public spaces and infrastructure that can leverage private investment and economic revitalization of Springfield's downtown district.
- The city's plan lays out how they would connect with the Black River by bringing new and current amenities to the riverfront via a Riverwalk with places to sit, dine, and recreate. The plan also spells out how to make the downtown safe for pedestrians by improving walkability with the Riverwalk, and streetscape improvements like traffic calming, places for pedestrians to cross, and bike trails to connect downtown to **North Springfield**.
- Redeveloping riverfronts capitalizes on recreation potential, fosters economic development, repurposes vacant buildings or brownfield sites.
- **St. Johnsbury** is also exploring riverfront redevelopment options and riverfront trails and parks in their community.
- **St. Johnsbury**, the southern gateway to Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, is a shining example of what many Vermont towns strive for: a walkable downtown center; world renowned cultural institutions such as Catamount Arts, The Fairbanks Museum, and the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum; a beautiful welcome center; and a world class educational institution in the St Johnsbury Academy. Residents are ready to build on past work, breathe new life into existing initiatives, and identify new actions that can be taken to leverage all that St. Johnsbury has to offer and ensure a vibrant and prosperous future for the town.
- A new Riverwalk and expanded public transportation would allow young people living in **St. Johnsbury** and the surrounding areas to enjoy the downtown and expand access throughout the region. In addition, updating the St. Johnsbury Park and Ride, including adding EV fast charging, would allow the town to serve an EV hub for the region.
- **St. Johnsbury** is also one of the towns in Vermont with the highest number of combined sewer overflows (CSO). The overflows happen during heavy rainfall or snowmelt events when the wastewater system is overwhelmed by stormwater runoff. Applying CSO abatement and elimination funding (\$25M) in St. Johnsbury and other towns like it will fund projects to reduce or eliminate sewer overflow events, refurbishing related water infrastructure, and encourage redevelopment that faces the river and supports the town's river front.

Investing in Housing

- ARPA funding offers a chance for historic investment in strengthening our housing stock to address needs of a wide array of Vermonters.
- Investing in housing in Vermont will provide rental and mortgage assistance, offer new opportunities for remote workers looking to move to Vermont, accelerate our commitments to develop mixed-income housing, construct permanent housing for those experiencing homelessness, and expand necessary shelter capacity will have lasting effects on the health of our communities and residents.
- Many towns have crafted proposals to be ready to be a part of the greatest investment in housing in the history of Vermont.
- Growing communities have planned for the new housing needed. Other regions have identified areas for re- investment in existing, underutilized housing stock.
- **Brattleboro**, like many Vermont communities, is searching for answers to safely house the homeless in their community. ARPA funding will allow area affordable housing developers, partnering with Groundworks Collaborative, to rapidly build emergency housing, such as converting the Covered Bridge Inn to 34 units of affordable housing, providing families in Brattleboro experiencing homelessness a home rather than a room. This will alleviate pressure on unsustainable area motels and utilizing available rental vouchers to create sustainable housing solutions.
- Also in **Brattleboro**, new mixed income housing has been incorporated into the design for the new home of the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center. Providing ARPA funding now for these 26 new units of housing in downtown Brattleboro, with expansive views of the river and access to arts & culture is the type of investment Brattleboro wants and needs.
- Towns across Vermont like **Randolph** and **Woodstock** have planned for new affordable homeownership development for years. With ARPA funding, the Salisbury Square Homeownership Project, with 22 new highly energy efficient affordable homes in downtown Randolph will become a reality and Stafford Commons in Woodstock can finally build the long-awaited affordable Homeownership units, completing the vision and promise of this affordable housing development 15years in the making.
- If we leverage this opportunity, we will be able to bring 5,000 homes to market by the end of 2024, build new housing, rehabilitate distressed and under-utilized properties, and transition homeless to sustainable, safe housing we can afford.
- Additional housing stock will stabilize housing costs and provide opportunity for Vermonters to build wealth.
- For example, in **St. Johnsbury** there is a new downtown housing project proposed by Rural Edge and NVDA called Packard Court. This infill location of a devastating fire that destroyed 3 building on Main St, would add 30 units of mixed income housing and includes an attractive terraced parklet. The property is already owned by Rural Edge, with Environmental Reviews completed and design in hand.
- Additionally, in **St. Johnsbury**, the Caledonia Renaissance is a scatted site historic home renovation project in the Seasons Neighborhood. With ARPA funding provided now these 5 building could be rehabilitated, made energy efficient and help sever the housing needs of the region.
- In **Putney**, there is new housing proposed by Windham Windsor Housing Trust for Putney Village adjacent to the Putney Food Coop. Putney Village Housing would provide 24 new apartments, duplexes and triplexes centered around a community garden.

Broadband/Cell

- ARPA funds will be used to build out fiber-to-the-premises broadband to 46,555 locations in Vermont that will be state-of-the-art and future proof. The ARPA funding will make high-speed broadband available to these locations at the symmetrical speed of 100/100 Mbps, which is faster and well above the asymmetrical speed of 25/3 Mbps – the standard the Federal Government currently uses to define high-speed broadband. The 46,555 locations targeted for ARPA funding presently lack access to broadband at 25/3Mbps, and are in places where there is no prospect of other funding solutions, such as the Federal Communication’s Rural Digital Opportunity Fund program, or Vermont’s Connectivity Initiative grant program. The 46,555 locations are comprised of: 12,366 locations that are presently considered “underserved,” (i.e., they lack 4/1Mbps service); 13,694 locations that have access to 4/1Mbps service but lack access to 25/3Mbps service; and 495 locations that have access to 10/1 Mbps service but lack access to 25/3 Mbps service).
- Bringing Fiber to the Premise world-class broadband to all Vermont communities will serve as both an equalizer and a springboard to greater educational success. In **Alburgh**, fiber will increase economic activity by encouraging visitors to stay longer. Canadian second homeowners struggle to stay connected to work while in Alburgh forcing them to leave during the week. The expanded fiber will also improve education access for students—all of whom lack adequate broadband.
- According to a survey last spring, 321 locations students in the **Washington Central Unified Union School District** lack access to broadband, 409 locations with students in the **Addison Central School District**, 398 in the **Caledonia Central Supervisory Union**; and 505 in the **Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union**. This homework is present whether schools are in session or remote.
- In **Waterville**, affordable access to broadband will improve education outcomes for children and make the town more attractive to new residents. Broadband will increase tourism to Lamoille county generally and it will help Waterville cater to visitors.
- Similarly, **Marlboro** is mostly underserved with adequate broadband. The expansion of fiber will allow Marlboro to attract new residents and businesses and help ensure equal access to education for Marlboro’s children.
- As of Fall 2019, 52% of all locations in **Halifax** lacked access to even 4/1 internet access. All but 10 of the other locations in the community had access at less than the federal definition of broad 25/3. DVFiber, a local communications union district, is currently reviewing RFPs from potential partners to use ARPA funds to construct a Fiber-to-the-Press (FTTP) network to serve these last mile customers.
- A real estate agent in **Stratton** that has called the Department of Public Service repeatedly inquiry about internet speeds since people want to move there and work remote, but the speeds available are not sufficient.
- Communities with adequate connection are able to stimulate economic growth in high tech industries. One example of this is the Park Street School Redevelopment project in **Springfield**. It will attract and grow a high-tech workforce in Windsor County and leverage the incredible Gigabit broadband service available in there.

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