

Member Communities Make it Happen!

Member municipalities, like yours, are the backbone of KVCOG. Membership dues provide matching funds for over \$200,000 in government grants; make our vital services, such as data collection, analysis, and communication, possible; and allow us the flexibility to create new programs in response to our regions needs. Thank you!

Working with communities along the Kennebec River since 1967.
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Gearing Up!

The KVCOG Newsletter

Spring 2021

Madison: a Mission, a Mill, and the Future

Interview with Tim Curtis, Madison Town Manager & KVCOG Vice President, Board of Directors

By Kate Raymond, Membership and Communications Manager

Having grown up in Madison, it was a familiar homecoming to Town Manager, Tim Curtis, when he returned after a 20-year hiatus. With a background in Economic Development, he was engaged to write Madison's 2021 Comprehensive Plan, a great preparation to assume the role of Town Manager, which he has now held for 5 years.

"Madison has seen many changes over the past 5 years, most significantly the loss of the mill," said Tim, when we spoke in early March. "The immediate impact of that loss included both tax base and job losses, and while many of the implications for jobs have resolved through shifts to the mill in Skowhegan and to other industries with training through State and Federal investment, the tax base has yet to recover."

So, the recent investments in Madison have come at a welcome time. Through grant funding by the Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC), Madison Electric Works received \$300K to support development and construction in the industrial park, and the Anson-Madison Sanitary District received \$1 million to improve water treatment and reduce energy costs. Both grants are geared towards increased capacity, decreased costs, and stabilizing town infrastructure for outside investment.

And outside investment has come to Madison! Through a new partnership, GoLabs will produce wood fiber insulation using wood chip biproducts from local mills to replace fiberglass and cellulose insulation with more efficient and environmentally focused products. GoLabs model is popular in Europe, but will be the first of its kind in North America. This partnership has, itself, received another NBRC grant of \$1 million, to undertake a necessary replacement of the HVAC system in the mill.

While these recent investments and partnerships are of significance to Madison, the local economy is diverse, and the town's needs and goals for the future are vast. As the service center for the area, and having a broad base of 170+ small and micro-businesses, and with the goal of maintaining their age-friendly community, Madison has its eye on the future. A new Comp Plan, in process shortly, will incorporate the goals of: more accessible public buildings, creating appeal for younger families, increased housing availability for seniors and families, and incorporating the recently completed *Living Well in Madison* age-friendly plan.

"Our Planning Board has grown so much from the training and guidance KVCOG has offered," said Tim about Madison's membership with KVCOG. "We talk about Joint Purchasing being KVCOG's #1 service, but that is just the tip of the iceberg. Household Hazardous Waste Days and Textile Recycling have been a fantastic addition to Madison, and our citizens have truly embraced it. Recycling is an uphill battle, and whatever we can do to encourage removing it from the waste stream is important. Being on KVCOG's Board of Directors has given me a greater understanding of the services you provide. I hope others use Madison as an example of how they can utilize their membership with KVCOG to the towns best benefit."

Currently in Madison, KVCOG is also the administer for the millions of dollars in grants from NBRC, is the Contracted Planner for the town of Madison, and will soon guide the Comp Plan process. ⚙️



From the Executive Director

Dear Members and Partners,

I am delighted to join KVCOG as the new Executive Director. For the past 30 years I have been involved with a range of planning, public policy and economic development efforts across the country and I was drawn to KVCOG's mission of helping communities reach their full potential. In the coming months I will be getting to know the great people involved in leading our communities, businesses, partners, and key institutions across our service area. I look forward to learning about the issues that concern you and listening to your thoughts on our role in providing solutions.

The pandemic and resulting recession have been devastating to our businesses and communities and there is much uncertainty about the future. One element that this crisis underscores is: we are all in this together. The pandemic has highlighted how interconnected and interdependent we are.

KVCOG's role is to help our communities and businesses scale up to meet these challenges by creating partnerships, planning, and bringing into focus federal, state, and philanthropic funding to solve complex problems. KVCOG's joint purchasing program is a central example that by pooling the buying power of all our member communities we can obtain high quality goods and pass along the savings to our members. While this program generally focused on items like road salt, when communities needed PPE, this program was there to help. Efforts such as updating the Old Canada Road scenic byway plan are examples of our regional efforts that benefit not only communities along the corridor but highlight the national importance our region for cross border trade, outdoor recreation, and ecological health.

I look forward to 2021, listening to your ideas and concerns, and charting a path forward for the region. ⚙️

Ole

Ole Amundsen III
Executive Director

Our Members:

Albion | Anson | Athens | Belgrade | Benton | Bingham
Brighton Plt. | Burnham | Cambridge | Canaan | Caratunk
Chelsea | China | Clinton | Cornville | Detroit (new)
Emden | Fairfield | Fayette | Freedom | Gardiner
Hallowell (new) | Hartland | Highland Plt. | Jackman
Litchfield | Madison | Monmouth | Moose River | Moscow
New Portland | Norridgewock | Oakland | Palermo (new)
Palmyra | Pittsfield | Pleasant Ridge Plt. | Randolph
Readfield | Ripley | Rome | Skowhegan | Smithfield
Solon | Starks | The Forks | Troy | Unity | Wayne
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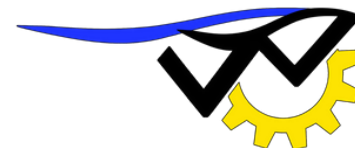
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KVCOG
17 Main Street
Fairfield, ME 04937



Upcoming Resiliency Series Event

Culverts: Not Such a Drain After All

Thursday, April 29th at 9:30AM

Register for this FREE Zoom Meeting Here: <https://bit.ly/3lVMixV>

April showers bring May flowers; but, 34 years ago those same showers and combined snow melt caused the Kennebec River to inundate 2,100 homes and resulted in *\$100 million in damages* (\$231 million in 2021 dollars). That type of catastrophic flooding makes a lasting impact, but we don't often recall the more persistent – and ultimately more costly – nuisance flooding that occurs every year.

In our daily lives, we are also usually unaware of each culvert we traverse as we commute from place to place, but where any road crosses any stream or river there is a culvert or a bridge. An undersized, or poorly designed culvert can quickly wash away a section of road, creating a significant safety hazard and adding substantial costs to a municipalities public works budget. *Following best practices to identify and address potential flooding problems well before they occur makes both fiscal and safety sense.*

To help navigate these and related issues, KVCOG is teaming up with Ernie Hilton, Selectman from Starks, Maine, and Maine Audubon's Stream Smart team. Join us as we discuss how a community can build better, safer, infrastructure while improving stream and river habitats. Participants are encouraged to come with questions and examples they have encountered in their own communities.✳



CEDS Update

By Jeff Sneddon, Community and Economic Development Specialist

The Kennebec Valley region has a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that covers a five-year period ('17-'22) and incorporates the region's vision for a robust economy. This strategic planning tool is funded by the Department of Commerce; Economic Development Administration (EDA) and helps the region to access and guide investments that have positive and sustaining impacts.

CEDS consists of four inter-related sections: Summary Background, SWOT Analysis, Strategic Direction/Action Plan and Evaluation. When the plan is implemented through the collaboration of partners and stakeholders, it serves as a road map to promote economic growth, to expand prosperity, and fosters a resilient and sustainable economy. It incorporates the goals and performance benchmarks established by KVCOG's CEDS Strategy Committee, and both tracks and anticipates changes in the region's economy.

This strategic economic development tool is reviewed and updated annually and is coming to the end of its five-year planning cycle. KVCOG is beginning the process of updating the CEDS plan and will be collaborating with public, private, and non-profit sectors within the Kennebec Valley region for input as part of the process to update the five-year plan.

The update process will be ongoing through 2021 and community engagement opportunities will be announced in the next few months. Input from communities, businesses, educational institutions, and non-profits is critical in identifying the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Ongoing initiatives and new opportunities will be revealed when we work together to update this plan. For more information about CEDS and/or if you would like to be a part of the Strategy Committee, please contact Jeff Sneddon, Community and Economic Development Specialist at (207) 453-4258 or jsneddon@kvcoq.org. ✳

Comprehensive Plans and How They Benefit Your Community

Communities complete Comprehensive (Comp) Plans for a variety of reasons. They help prepare for the future and the opportunity to review community policies through a process that promotes discussion and helps communities avoid problems that occur when decisions are over time. It is not an ordinance or a set of rules. Instead Comp Plans direct a town government along a path the people choose, over a 10 year period while providing a "snapshot in time" of the town. A Comp Plan is there to encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas, while protecting the towns character, making efficient use of public services, and preventing development sprawl. Good planning makes good communities!

Belgrade is a great example of a community which has recently completed their Comp Plan with KVCOG. Their Plan was a driving force for instituting change and active planning and is used as a guide for coordinating committees and staff to implement identified strategies. With a dedicated committee that monitors progress, reports status, and makes implementation recommendations, Belgrade's Comp Plan allows the town to actively handle change and development to safeguard natural resources and quality of life. George Steel, Belgrade Planning Board Member says, "[Our] Plan has provided focus as well as impetus and some level of accountability for various Town Boards, Committees and officials. The Comp Plan, since it...was overwhelmingly approved by the voters, gives efforts like ordinance updates political cover...It is difficult to argue with efforts to implement these recommendations, including ordinance development, if you believe in local democracy."

Comp Plans require a bold planning process that engages the public in a meaningful way. Without strong public participation, you run the risk of developing a plan that lacks broad community support. Ideally there should be a long-term process of building awareness of how planning and addressing goals can benefit the community. Creating public ownership of the Plan is essential if it is to be effective and worthwhile. A community should avoid the Plan becoming a response to state requirements rather than to community needs.

KVCOG can facilitate the Comp Planning process for any town in our region. On a contracted basis, we offer competitive rates, hefty discounts to our members, and the flexibility to meet your town budget needs. The process takes about two years to complete. In recent months KVCOG has contracted with and begun work on four new Comp Plans: in Rome, Jackman, Skowhegan, and Readfield. We are also in the process of finishing Plans in Monmouth and Fayette; and are at the public participation phase in Winslow, held up by the pandemic but again underway again soon. KVCOG would love to begin this process in your town! Contact Planning Director, Joel Greenwood, with questions: jgreenwood@kvcoq.org or (207) 453-4258. ✳

New RLF for Start-Ups and Small Businesses

KVCOG recently received a federal investment of \$670,000 to expand our Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). These funds, distributed by the US EDA, were made available through the CARES Act and have allowed KVCOG to make significant new investments in our regional economy by supporting small businesses, employment, and entrepreneurship in the Kennebec Valley. These funds are earmarked to alleviate sudden and severe economic dislocation caused by the pandemic, to provide permanent resources to support economic resiliency, and to further the long-term economic objectives of the Kennebec Valley.

Funds are intended to help start-ups and existing small and mid-sized businesses with growth, expansion, investment in equipment and facilities, or opportunities to pivot in the face of the pandemic. Examples of funding use: improvement or expansion of online presence, renovation or expansion of facilities to increase capacity or improve customer experience, and/or the purchase or replacement of equipment that could increase productivity or efficiency.

New to the CARES Act RLF is the availability of favorable terms including interest rates as low as 0% and the waiver of typical RLF requirements, such as leveraged capital or credit unavailability.

To be eligible for this funding, businesses must be located in Kennebec, Somerset, or western Waldo Counties. More information and application can be found at www.kvcoq.org/rlf. Contact Will Harper or Robyn Stanicki, Community Resiliency Coordinators, with your questions at loans@kvcoq.org. ✳

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