

**Rochester High School Repurposing Committee Update March 2023,
Submitted by Kathryn Schenkman and Vic Ribaud**

March 6, 2023: Annual Rochester Town Meeting: Vic Ribaud and Kathryn Schenkman spoke to the project at the annual Rochester Town Meeting. Vic spoke to the RHS Repurposing Committee's report published in the Town Report, and clarified information provided in the Addendum to the that report, which was distributed at the meeting. The Addendum included a breakdown of the Phase 1 \$3.1 million construction costs, and tax rate information. Kathryn provided updates on the environmental assessment, the Feb 10 site visit by Floodplain manager John Broker-Campbell, the \$10,525 in funds raised to date towards heating the HS building, and announced the April 15 WRVP fundraising event "Turn up the Heat" on April 15. Kathryn stated that to date the project has raised \$92,000 in funding support.

March 9, 2023: Senator Sanders Congressional Directed Spending (CDS): The Committee submitted to Senator Sanders Office an application for FY2024 CDS in the amount of \$2.39 million. Will Stevens from Senator Sanders office responded that our project is included with Senator Sanders submission of projects to the Senate Appropriations Committee, under the USDA Community Facilities Account.

March 9, 2023 WCAX Spot: Vic, Dick and Kathryn appeared in a WCAX spot interviewed by Melissa Cooney about the RHS Repurposing Project, in a story that covered VT HS repurposing projects. Below is the link.

<https://www.wcax.com/2023/03/09/vt-communities-give-new-life-vacant-school-buildings/>

March 15, 2023, BRELLA Enrollment: With guidance and support from Sarah Wraight of TRORC, the Rochester BRELLA application was submitted on March 15, 2023, on behalf of the Town of Rochester as a prospective purchaser of the HS property.

March 28, 2023, BRELLA Approval (SMS Site #2023-5229): The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) determined that the Town of Rochester is eligible to participate in the Brownfields Reuse and Environmental Liability Limitation (BRELLA) as a prospective purchaser of the Rochester High School, based on the application and supporting documentation submitted on 3/15/23.

BRELLA provides participants with DEC staff assistance in the review and oversight of activities to investigate, abate, remediate and monitor, when necessary, a brownfields site. A Certificate of Completion is issued upon performance of all actions required to attain cleanup levels established in the corrective action plan developed for the property. Statutory liability protections become effective upon issuance of the Certificate of Completion. The next step is the creation of a work plan.

March 29, 2023, BRELLA Funding Application: On behalf of the Town, and with guidance and support from Sarah Wraight of TRORC, the Committee submitted a VTDEC Brownfields Response Program Application for Funding to cover the cost of developing a Phase II Work Plan, for a projected cost of \$5,308, as well as other unknown costs. For more detailed information on the BRELLA process, see the Committee's Report published the Annual Report for the Town of Rochester.

Floodway/Floodplain Mitigation: Floodplain Manager John Broker-Campbell made a site visit on February 10 reviewed the project with encouragement, and provided the next critical steps. Sandy Haas is seeking a Jurisdictional Opinion on Act 250. John provided contacts of Pete Kopsco or Stephanie Giles.

Sandy reports that she got through to Peter Kopsco, and it appears that her interpretation of Act 250 was right. She intends to request a formal JO, but cautions that at this stage of the project it's a bit tricky, since we don't yet know definitely what businesses/activities will be installed. She will base the request on mixed-use commercial plus arts events. She assumes that for now we do not expect to have ANY housing/apartments.

Floodway—The original subdivision of the school properties left a sliver of Floodway on the high school property. A new boundary has been surveyed which will leave the high school plot with no Floodway. The

Rochester Planning Commission informed us that the change will be a 'minor boundary line adjustment' and no local procedure will be necessary. Dick reports that the regional engineer got back to David Rugh, attorney for the Supervisory Union, with the following requested information re water permits: the property owners (RSUD) need to submit an exemption application, along with the plat information (new and old boundaries, structures, water systems, septic systems). Then it's about 60 days to get an answer as to whether or not we need to apply for a full potable water/wastewater permit, which we would need to finalize the boundary change.

Floodplain—The Floodplain touches the existing high school building, so, for both funding and insurance purposes we need to find a solution that will protect the building from flood damage in the future. Several solutions have been proposed, and we are currently working to find one that will be acceptable to both state and federal funding sources. To that end, the Regional Floodplain Manager of the Department of Environmental Conservation John Broker-Campbell and the Environmental Officer of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Grace Vinson, are conferring. We are awaiting their counsel.

Dick Robson has reached out to Grace and John to schedule an onsite meeting, sending them the new plat that shows the area being removed from the HS property. Gretel St Lawrence, VT Environmental Specialist, responded to Dick on 3/3 informing him that Grace is out of the office until 4/7. Gretel will be meeting with Ann and John to discuss the HS floodplain issues and get back to us to discuss the next steps, and to schedule an onsite visit.

Project Manager: Liz Curry, our interim project manager, has completed her contract. She informed us that because she has no HUD "8 Factor Analysis" experience re to floodplains, she feels that at this point our funds are best spent on the cost of an engineer in identifying a mitigation solution for the building's location in the floodplain; that once that issue is resolved she would be happy to work with us again.

March 31, 2023, Northern Windsor ARPA Visit: Erika Hoffman-Kiess, Dir of the Green Mtn Economic Development Corp reached out to the Committee because state representatives will be traveling to Windsor County on Monday April 10 to promote available ARPA Funding for infrastructure projects, and to share the "how-to" to access this funding. The Administration has been traveling the state to have conversations in communities where applications and overall dollar deployment has been lacking.

Jessica Vintinner, ACCD Legislative Dir. and Principal Assistant stated that the Agency is looking to host a meeting with community members (hopefully upwards of 50-70 people in attendance) and Administration officials from the Agency of Natural Resources, ACCD, Building and General Services, Agency of Agriculture, The Vermont Community Broadband Board . . . etc. to discuss available grants, how to access funding, and get some feedback from the Community regarding barriers to access.

Erika contacted the Committee wondering if we are interested, and have available capacity for a session in the Rochester High School building. Jeanie Levitan and Becky Donnet responded to our request and confirmed PHCC as the meeting venue. PHCC has the space capacity and is willing to set up tables sufficient for the panel of presenters and seating for 50-70 participants. Lesley and Kathryn committed to be available to assist. The ARPA information is a significant funding source, and convening the meeting in Rochester is a great convenience—so spread the word and attend if you're interested.