

# 2004 Annual Report

*Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) is the regional planning commission and the economic development corporation serving the three counties of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom: Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans. NVDA is an equal opportunity employer, lender and provider.*

*“The purpose of the Association shall be to develop and promote through study, planning and publicity, the recreational, agricultural, industrial, natural and human resources of the region and to work for the economic and social betterment of the region.”*

– NVDA Bylaws

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# Personal Messages



Like many others who work in the Northeast Kingdom, I represent an entity that is almost exclusively referred to by a series of initials. This – as anyone from “initial” organizations can attest –

inevitably spurs a round of questions at dinner parties and other social events:

“So what do you do ... and what is this N-V-D-A?”

I’ve developed an NVDA 101 response, a high-level explanation that, in my opinion, puts in the best word for our outfit...without causing the eyes of dinner guests to glaze over. Given our complex mission, this was not easy. Here’s my stock answer:

*Northeastern Vermont Development Association is the regional planning commission and the economic development corporation. We help 55 communities in the Northeast Kingdom address municipal planning, transportation, and zoning issues. We also work with small businesses and create jobs.*

Unfortunately, the abbreviated description fails to capture many important aspects of NVDA – namely the enormous commitment of talent and resources behind our day-to-day operations and our ultimate success. In addition to our hard-working staff, I think of our board president Arthur Sanborn and all the other board members who give so freely of their time. We faced many challenges during the past year, and without the help of these people, we could not continue to carry out our mission.

Other pages of this report document some of NVDA’s activities during the previous year; I will not burden you with a repetition of those events in this space. Suffice it to say, we are proud to represent NVDA and what we have achieved in FY 2004. We are ready to face the challenges yet to come.

Steve Patterson  
Executive Director

Those who are closely involved with civic life in the Northeast Kingdom know that behind every successful village, town, and city, is a dedicated network of board members, committee members, and volunteers.

Such is the case with Northeastern Vermont Development Association. Serving on the board of NVDA is a compelling example of how civic involvement can impact our quality of life. Over the past year, our board has taken on a number of challenges, including economic development, viable transit services, alternative energy sources, updating the regional plan, and the ultimate sustainability of our own organization. These issues have no easy answers. Ongoing involvement and input from our board is necessary for our long-term success.

Our effectiveness depends largely on the help we receive from our board members and others in this wonderful community we call the Northeast Kingdom. If this year’s support and participation is an indication, we should enjoy a banner year in FY 2005.

NVDA makes a difference in the lives of our friends and neighbors, and its dedicated staff and active board members are the engine that drives the organization forward in its mission. We are deeply appreciative of the fact that so many of you have given so freely of your valuable (and often limited) time.

With the first of my two years as board president behind me, I can honestly say that it has been a pleasure to serve the Kingdom. Throughout the remainder of my term, I will continue to welcome your valued opinions and involvement.

Thank you for your hard work in 2004. I look forward to collaborating with you in 2005.



Art Sanborn  
NVDA Board President

# The People of NVDA

## The Board

### Members At Large

Kelly Deslauriers  
Lawrence Donna  
Conrad Doyon  
Carol Moore  
John Morley III  
Kathleen O'Connor  
Fern Tanguay

### Caledonia County

Edward Bates  
Brent Beck  
Eric Benson  
Doug Bora  
Wendy Bora  
Elwin Cross  
Kenneth Davis  
Martha Feltus  
Kim Fried  
Joseph Garcia  
Wade Johnson  
Don Morrill  
David Redmond  
John Reiss  
John Reynolds  
Arthur Sanborn  
Lewis Shattuck  
Albert Sponheimer  
Donald Wood

### Essex County

Sherry Belknap  
Richard Bryer  
Reginald Bunnell  
Dana Caron  
Joel Cope  
Kirwin Flanders  
David Gray

Stanley Grittner  
Steve Hawley  
Doug Heinmuller  
Fredrick Hodgdon  
Mark Joyce  
David Lunnie  
Joseph Robbason  
Peter Rodin  
Lawrence Tighe

### Orleans County

Todd Alix  
Sherman Allen, Jr.  
Richard Baraw  
Charles Barrows  
Floyd Brown  
Forest Buckland  
Bridget Collier  
Robert Croteau  
William Davies  
Richard Degre  
Winston Dowland  
Michael Dunn  
Charles Kezar  
Real Lanoue  
Michael Marcotte  
Stephen Marsh  
Roland Mayhew  
Michael Metcalf  
Michael Pappalardo  
Stephen Pitkin  
Beula-Jean Shattuck  
Harry Shover  
Cindy Shover  
Dale Sweeney  
John Ward, Jr.  
Alden Warner

## Legislators

Rep. David Bolduc  
Rep. Donald Bostic  
Rep. David Brown  
Rep. David Clark  
Rep. Howard Crawford  
Rep. John Hall  
Rep. Cola Hudson  
Rep. William Johnson  
Rep. Duncan Kilmartin  
Rep. Leigh Larocque  
Rep. Steven Larrabee

Rep. Harvey Otterman  
Rep. Janice Peaslee  
Rep. John Rogers  
Rep. Loren Shaw  
Rep. Nancy Sheltra  
Rep. Robert Starr, Jr.  
Senator Julius Canns  
Senator James Greenwood  
Senator Vincent Illuzzi  
Senator Bernier Mayo

## NVDA Staff

Annalei Babson  
*Planner*  
Judy Butson  
*Business Manager*  
David Gruenig  
*Planner*  
Steve Patterson  
*Executive Director*  
Brian Hanson  
*Implementation Specialist*  
Wenda Hanson  
*Office Manager*  
Tracy McIntyre  
*GIS Specialist*

Alison Meaders  
*Planner*  
Douglas Morton  
*Transportation Planner*  
Mary Paull  
*Economic Development Coordinator*  
Merike Petrich  
*Planning Manager*  
David Snedeker  
*Senior Planner*  
Barbara Warden  
*Receptionist*



NVDA Staff: (left to right): Back row: David Gruenig, Tracy McIntyre, Merike Petrich, Doug Morton. Front row: Alison Meaders, Wenda Hanson, Brian Hanson, Judy Butson. Missing: Dave Snedeker, Annalei Babson, Mary Paull

# Planning

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*As the regional planning commission, NVDA fulfills the responsibilities mandated by 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117 by helping towns write their own plans. Staff gathers background data, creates maps (See the inset story on GIS), recommends implementation strategies; answers a slew of technical questions (usually fielded by Implementation Specialist Brian Hanson); and even suggests planning goals, objectives, and policies. And this list is far from inclusive.*

*It's not surprising that the need for technical assistance is growing. Planning is a circular process, not a linear one, and it demands ongoing reevaluation to keep goals current and relevant. Effective planning touches upon nearly every aspect of daily life in the community, and the public must be involved every step of the way. The effort, however, is worthwhile. The end result is a strategic tool that gives every community the power to chart its own course, in a way that complements local values and traditions.*

Many communities may not realize that it is possible to have *non-regulatory town plans*, without implementing zoning regulations. And, the benefits of having an approved town plan are worth considering. While state law does require municipalities to have an adopted and approved town plan in place before implementing zoning bylaw, *planning and zoning are not one and the same*. Town plans are often needed to accomplish non-regulatory goals, like fix a dangerous intersection, monitor water quality, purchase development rights to preserve a scenic view or open recreation lands, or designate a village center. We are always happy to explore these options with any community that has an interest in developing a plan.

In FY 2004, NVDA Planners Annalei Babson and Alison Meaders became more proactive in the town planning

process. In the past, our policy has been to let the municipality initiate the dialog and assist only on request. Today, communities without plans are facing the potential loss of traditional funding sources, making NVDA's outreach process more important than ever. Initial efforts have been successful. One community, which has never had a town plan, now has a planning commission in place and a solid working draft of a town plan. Annalei and Alison will continue this initiative to ensure that every community in the Northeast Kingdom has the opportunity to fully realize the benefits of planning.

## Technical Assistance

In addition to fielding a barrage of daily telephone inquiries, NVDA does a significant body of work "in the field" to help towns keep apace with development trends and statutory changes. For example, several towns have recently asked for guidelines for regulations regarding telecommunications facilities, as well as wind energy systems, and NVDA has readily responded. In FY 2004 permitting applications for wind towers sparked heated public debate. In response, Senior Planner David Snedeker assembled an ad hoc Wind Energy committee. Composed of board members, as well as proponents *and* opponents of wind towers, this group developed and distributed an objective white paper on wind energy. In other environmental issues, Planner Annalei Babson worked closely with the State Department of Environmental Conservation to organize watershed councils in the Stevens and



The 1857 Westmore Schoolhouse building soon will begin life anew as the town's municipal office. NVDA wrote and administered grants to fund the renovation project.

## GIS: Picture Perfect Planning

GIS is one of those terms that's likely to be bandied about without a proper understanding of its full range of capabilities...or even what it stands for. A Geographic Information System is a generic term for a program that incorporates geographic data (information that you would find on a map, such as roads, streams, buildings) with databases (grand list, census information, transportation traffic counts, demographic data) to do some sort of



Do you know which NEK community this GIS map depicts? The answer is on the bottom of page 3.

analysis and or produce maps. Town plans that are approved by the regional planning commission must contain a number of maps, all of which can be prepared using GIS. These maps provide a graphic and fairly accurate picture of a community of any given point in time. They can even help planning commissions visualize the future.

NVDA has an in-house GIS specialist, Tracy McIntyre, who works with various ESRI GIS software products to assist municipalities, as well as organizations that either don't have or can't afford GIS capability. He's also a great resource to novice GIS users. In 2004, NVDA provided GIS support to municipalities, state agencies, and private organizations. In addition to producing maps for town plans, our services were used to create site plans for grant applications, generate maps for watershed plans and emergency E911 dispatch services, and define boundaries for zoning and downtown designations. On occasion a town will elect to not use NVDA's services or will have a need for a specialized map that NVDA can't produce (such as a parcel/tax map). We will then help the town locate another appropriate GIS service provider.

The best advice for novice users of GIS: Don't try this at home - at least without getting some expert advice first. There is a steep learning curve in GIS, and an inexperienced user can encounter some frustrating technical difficulties. Incorporating multiple layers of data is a perfect example of what can go wrong. No map layers are 100% accurate, and if the user fails to account for margin-of-error factors, the end result can be embarrassingly off. It's not unheard of to end up with a public park that shows up on the wrong side of the highway, or even a residential property that's seated squarely in the middle of a lake. A local GIS expert like Tracy, who is familiar with the lay of the land in the Northeast Kingdom, can help you avoid these classic pitfalls and produce a visualization of your planning efforts that's as close to perfect as possible.

Wells watershed areas. Watershed planning will rely heavily on local input and support. To date, both efforts have drawn a high level of participation from affected communities.

Emergency preparedness in the face of natural disasters and hazardous releases gained heightened importance when FEMA introduced new prerequisites for receiving funding. NVDA Planner David Gruenig spearheaded an outreach effort to every one of our member communities to ensure compliance with the new regulations.

Finally, NVDA continued to work to preserve the vitality of the downtowns and village centers of the Northeast Kingdom. In 2004 staff continued to work and collaborate with downtown committees in St. Johnsbury, Barton, and Derby Line.

### Grant Administration and Management

NVDA also helps its member communities obtain grant funding for community development projects and often

administers the projects they fund. In 2004 Planning Manager Merike Petrich helped secure VCDP funds to revamp the Island Pond Public Library. Once renovations are complete, the historic three-story structure will gain more than 700 square feet of usable space, much of which will become a children's room. Other improvements include the installation of an ADA-accessible bathroom and entrance way, as well as new period-style lighting fixtures, limited-area fire sprinkler heads, heating, electrical, and ventilation systems upgrade.

Similarly, work on the Goodrich Library in Newport continues to progress with NVDA's administrative expertise. The city was awarded VCDP funds late last year, but was temporarily stalled with initial bids came in too high. The project is now back on track. Scope of work includes historic preservation and accessibility.

Construction of Indoor Recreation of Orleans County (IROC) is nearing completion. The 50,000 square foot

facility will offer affordable access to a broad range of indoor sports, including soccer, basketball, skating, tennis, and swimming. In 2004 NVDA administered two grants on IROC's behalf. VCDP funds are being used to create a community room, and Economic Development Initiative funds (HUD) are helping to defray over costs of construction.

Four decades have passed since the Westmore Schoolhouse shut its doors. Staff has secured and administered grants to renovate the nearly 150-year-old-structure. The project is going smoothly and will be completed in the

fall, when the building begins its new useful life as the Town office.

Additionally, NVDA wrote a VCDP planning grant for the town of Lyndon to develop an operating plan for an early childhood resource center. The work also will identify and estimate preliminary costs for construction. The Town of Sheffield acquired VCDP and USDA Rural Development funds to make its town hall handicapped accessible, thanks to NVDA's assistance. Construction will begin shortly.

## Status of Planning and Zoning in the Northeast Kingdom

Town .....	Plan .....	Zoning
Albany .....	None .....	None
Barnet .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Barton .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Bloomfield .....	None .....	Flood only
Brighton .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Brownington .....	Approved (2) .....	None
Brunswick .....	Adopted (1) .....	Adopted
Burke .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Canaan .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Charleston .....	Expired .....	None
Concord .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Coventry .....	Approved (2) .....	Flood only
Craftsbury .....	Expired .....	Flood only
Danville .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Derby .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
East Haven .....	Expired .....	None
Glover .....	Writing .....	Flood only
Granby .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Greensboro .....	Adopted (1) .....	Revising (2)
Groton .....	Expired .....	Proposed (1)
Guildhall .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Hardwick .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Holland .....	Expired .....	None
Irasburg .....	None .....	None
Jay .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted

### Plan Footnotes

- (1) A plan has been adopted by the town but NOT approved by NVDA.
- (2) A plan has adopted by the town AND approved by NVDA.

Town .....	Plan .....	Zoning
Kirby .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Lemington .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Lowell .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Lunenburg .....	Expired .....	None
Lyndon .....	Writing .....	Adopted
Maidstone .....	Adopted (1) .....	Adopted
Morgan .....	Writing .....	Revising (2)
Newark .....	Expired .....	None
Newport City .....	Writing .....	Adopted
Newport Town .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Norton .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Peacham .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Ryegate .....	Adopted (1) .....	Proposed (1)
Sheffield .....	Expired .....	None
St Johnsbury .....	Approved (2) .....	Proposed (1)
Stannard .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Sutton .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Troy .....	Expired .....	Adopted
Unorganized Areas ...	Expired .....	Adopted
Victory .....	None .....	None
Walden .....	Expired .....	None
Waterford .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Westfield .....	Approved (2) .....	Adopted
Westmore .....	Adopted (1) .....	Adopted
Wheelock .....	Adopted (1) .....	None

### Zoning Footnotes

- (1) A zoning bylaw has been written or revised AND is being adopted.
- (2) Existing bylaw is being revised but adoption has not begun.

# Economic Development

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*NVDA has the unique challenge of serving the Kingdom as both the regional planning commission and the economic development corporation. The dual focus places considerable demand on our staff and resources, yet it also empowers us to work more effectively. No town, regardless of its size, can prosper without livable neighborhoods, up-to-date infrastructure, and vibrant town centers. NVDA is able to combine the strengths of two organizations to support viable businesses and create sustainable jobs.*

Many NVDA projects touch on both planning and economic development issues, and the Charles E. Carter Business Resource Center is no exception. NVDA's planning staff wrote and administered VCDP grants to build the Center. They also worked closely with the Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont, who obtained a grant from the Economic Development Administration. Senior Planner Dave Snedeker continues to lease space to tenants in the Center. To date, the facility is nearly filled, and the conference area is frequently rented by local employers for special training needs.

The Jay Peak golf course similarly blended planning and economic development issues. The entire project, which will cost about \$7 million, has been financed from private sources, as well as funds from VCDP and Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA). The VCDP funds are being administered by NVDA Planner Brian Hanson. When completed, Jay Peak will have an 18-hole golf course with clubhouse and maintenance structures. The project will make this important ski area more profitable as a year-round resort, which will, in turn, bring more tourism dollars into northern region of Orleans County.

The closing of the Gilman paper mill and the subsequent reopening of the Dirigo Paper Company is another project that has required both NVDA's planning and economic development resources. Gilman Paper had been an important employer in the community for more than a century, and when it closed two years ago, many suffered. In 2004 the efforts of NVDA and the Small Business Development Center finally began to pay off when a multimillion-dollar financing package came through for the Dirigo Paper Company. A portion of this financing comes from VCDP funds, as well as CDBG funds from neighboring New Hampshire. Dirigo Paper Company is now

officially open for business and is in the process of hiring the majority of its 90 employees this summer.

## **Small Business Development Center**

Our ongoing partnership with the Small Business Development Center allows NVDA to provide a high level of consultative expertise to potential business employers. Jon Freeman, Business Advisor, is part of the SBDC's state-wide network, which works to strengthen existing businesses and assist start-ups with high-quality, no-cost counseling. Jon works out of both of NVDA's offices in St. Johnsbury and Newport, and we have developed an effective working relationship that maintains SBDC confidentiality requirements. NVDA staff frequently make referrals to the SBDC when working with small business operators, and each year, Jon takes on more than 100 clients in this manner. NVDA's Business Assistance Program (see the inset story) is highly illustrative of this dynamic partnership.

The Vermont SBDC conducts studies to assess its impact



The Charles E. Carter Business Resource Center opened late this spring in the St. Johnsbury-Lyndon Industrial Park. The facility is almost fully tenanted.

on the Vermont economy, using tangible measurements such as job creation and capital formation. It determined that as of July 2004, Jon has excelled in capital formation for the region, bringing in more than \$9 million. Clients rate his services very high and, in turn, recommend him to others. In fact, Jon Freeman was selected as the Vermont SBDC Star Performer of 2004. He will be recognized at the Association of Small Business Development Centers Annual Conference in New Orleans later this year. We at NVDA congratulate Jon on his success and look forward to working with him in FY 2005.

### Other Collaborations

NVDA also works with other outstanding organizations, such as the Northeast Kingdom Workforce Investment Board, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative, and the Regional Advisory Board for the North Country Career Center. NVDA has a long-standing partnership with the regional marketing organization, Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association (NEKTTA). We continue to carry out an annual joint work plan with NEKTTA and appoint staff to serve on its board. This year, NVDA's planning manager, Merike Petrich, wrote a successful USDA Rural Business Opportunity Grant for NEKTTA to develop a regional central travel reservation system. We

believe that this project will help the Northeast Kingdom fully realize the potential economic benefits of tourism.

### Financial Assistance

NVDA helps new and existing businesses with low-interest financing, primarily through an Intermediary Relending Program (IRP). Loans range from \$5,000 to \$100,000, and may account for no more than 75% of a project's total financing. Funded by USDA Rural Development, the IRP provides low-interest loans to establish or expand small businesses, as well as provide jobs and economic stability to the region.

NVDA has received three loans from USDA to fund active IRPs. The first IRP, in the amount of \$275,000, was established in 1995. It has now provided local businesses with nearly \$360,000 in financing and has leveraged \$1.7 million in other financing. In 2001, NVDA received a second USDA loan in the amount of \$300,000. To date NVDA has used this loan to lend a total of \$254,728 to area businesses (with \$10,900 coming from the first IRP) and leverage \$3,025,511 in other financing. Benefiting businesses were WT Solutions, St. Johnsbury Automobile, St. Johnsbury Subaru, Carmen's Ice Cream, Kingdom Brewers, and Majestic Millwork. In FY 2004 NVDA

### The Northeast Kingdom Business Planning Program

In 2004 NVDA ran a highly successful program to help Northeast Kingdom entrepreneurs with the common challenges of business start-up, retention and expansion.

Under this program, NVDA was able to pay 90% of consulting expenses, which put even the most sophisticated and specialized services within reach of small operations. Eligible activities included market studies; location, production or market feasibility studies; Act 250 and other permitting assistance; marketing plans, and environmental testing. Projects generally ran about \$10,000.

NVDA was able to establish the program, thanks to a \$99,000 USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant. Several small businesses, representing a broad spectrum across retail, service, and manufacturing sectors participated, including a maple sugar producer, a bed and breakfast operator, and even an inventor seeking a patent.

Planning Manager Merike Petrich was the chief administrator of this project. She developed an easy application process for businesses likely to participate. When approved, she would then provide overall direction of each consulting project.

Participating businesses were often unlikely to know how to locate a good consultant. Merike had the expertise to prepare Requests for Proposals (RFPs, as they're known in the industry) to attract the right kind of consulting assistance at a fair price. USDA Rural Development was also closely involved in the project, as was Mary Paull and Jon Freeman of the SBDC. As SBDC Business Advisor, Jon must maintain confidentiality when working with clients. Similarly, Merike Petrich worked with small businesses operators who had to confide sensitive and proprietary issues. Both Jon and Merike successfully referred clients to each other, without breaching confidentiality needs.

The success of the Northeast Kingdom Business Planning program depended largely on the combined expertise of NVDA and the SBDC. We will continue to seek ways to fund similar programs that empower local businesses.

applied for and received a third USDA loan in the amount of \$500,000.

NVDA also offers revolving loans through an older, smaller fund geared to meet the needs of clients whose proposals may not readily fit in with other programs. There was no activity for this revolving loan program in FY2004.

### Mary Paull

Although NVDA's Newport Incubator Building is technically her "home base," our full-time economic development coordinator leads a peripatetic existence by working one-on-one with business owners all over the tri-county region. She also consults with newcomers and visitors who are interested in either starting or relocating a business here. Most prospective business issues are sensitive and require a high-level of confidentiality. Over the years, Mary has succeeded in building a strong rapport with the local business community through tact, discretion, and a great sense of humor. NVDA makes 45-50 business and industry visits throughout the Northeast Kingdom annually. We plan to increase the number of visits in the coming year.

### Here are 2004 highlights from the field:

Over the year, Mary worked with a number of commercial businesses owners - both retail- and service-oriented who either wished to sell their operations or relocate to the Kingdom.

During the past year the Newport Incubator Building experienced a number of tenancy changes: Cancot USA, a long time tenant, closed along with its parent company in Montreal. NEK Physical Therapy, which was already a tenant in the building, expanded its gym area into the vacated space. Catalog Retail Marketing (CRMI - the call center) continued to downsize, vacating its two front offices and break room. The offices are now occupied by Dr. Will Birge. NVDA's office moved to another unit, giving the Small Business Development Center more privacy, and allowing additional space for the NEK Collaborative. The building is now fully occupied.

MSA (the helmet company) continues its strong growth and now has 121 employees, working 3 shifts daily. Over the past year the company gained national fame when its products were credited with saving lives of US soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Easton Hockey expanded operations with the addition of a composite hockey blade at another site in Newport. This company now totals more than 45 people in its Northeast Kingdom plants.



Mike Jones of Majestic Millwork is one of the new tenants in the Charles E. Carter Business Resource Center. In addition to custom millwork, Majestic produces high-end furniture, such as candle stands, end tables, and sideboards.

NVDA revived its Newport Airport Committee. The group is considering filing a 501(C)(3) application with the IRS and is moving ahead to form a separate entity. Such new vitality and plans for the future of the airport are refreshing and welcome!

The former Comstock building in the Orleans Industrial Park has become a business incubator in its own right. Vermont Beef Jerky is using some of the space, as is a candle-making operation, and Chebe (pronounced **chee-bee**), a manufacturer of an all-natural glucose free bread that is very popular in Brazil. Another food products company is just about to begin production at that location.

NVDA's monthly legislative breakfasts continue to grow in attendance and interest. Held in Newport from January through April, the meetings were all well attended in 2004.

NVDA has been invited to join a small committee composed of officials from Chittenden County, the Northeast Kingdom, and the state to recruit Canadian businesses to the state and, more specifically Chittenden County and the Northeast Kingdom.

During the past year NVDA has experienced increased activity in the area of potential new businesses and relocations. The number of referrals to the SBDC has also increased dramatically.

# Transportation Planning

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*Transportation is so closely connected to quality of life it's often taken for granted. Only when we can't get from Point A to Point B do we suddenly appreciate the importance of "keeping connected" in rural America. In the Northeast Kingdom, 63,219 people from 54 communities and one city are served by 1,045 miles of paved roads, 1,501 miles of unpaved roads, three state-owned airports, as well as scenic waterways and 150 miles of active railroad, and nearly 30 more miles of rails that have been converted to trails for cyclists, hikers and snowmobilers. This network must support the transportation needs of a region that meets and exceeds thresholds for rural classification, with low population densities ranging from 45.6 persons per square mile (Caledonia County) to a mere 9.7 (Essex County). Every year, NVDA carries out a work contract with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTRANS) to ensure the efficient operation of the Northeast Kingdom transportation planning program.*

NVDA coordinates the Northeast Kingdom Transportation Advisory Committee meetings and provides technical assistance to the group as needed. This group is specifically convened to allow residents from the Northeast Kingdom to have a voice in the state's transportation planning process. NVDA also assumed responsibility for facilitating meetings of the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative Transportation Committee Meetings. Although the two entities have separate mandates, membership on the committees does overlap. NVDA regards the dual facilitator responsibilities as a significant opportunity to broaden communication and build consensus on transportation issues.

Two new initiatives greatly boosted NVDA's public outreach in 2004. The new Web site ([www.nvda.net](http://www.nvda.net)) contains several pages of useful information about transportation planning in the Northeast Kingdom. In addition, NVDA *Transportation News*, a free newsletter circulated to road foremen and road commissions, helps to keep relevant information flowing throughout the Northeast Kingdom.

Staff amass valuable data to guide targeted and effective planning for 10, even 20 years out. This information comes in many forms - GIS maps, daily traffic counts, level of service - all of which can help state and local governments justify decisions on maintenance and upgrade projects, as well as business development and siting.

NVDA regularly works with its member communities on a broad range of transportation issues. Assistance takes the form of location GIS maps, town highway structures inventories, 5310 grant assistance, scenic byway planning, and a variety of improvement and upgrade projects. In

many cases, NVDA's expert assistance is often the catalyst needed to drive the project forward.

The Bridge and Culvert Inventory continued to be a successful program that was mutually beneficial to state agencies and municipalities. Using data standards developed by Vermont Center for Geographic Information and VTRANS, NVDA compiled extensive data on each bridge and culvert, including precise location and condition. This valuable information enables state agencies to formulate more effective long-term plans for infrastructure maintenance and improvements. The state passes this benefit along to participating communities by lowering the match requirement for state highway funding programs from 80/20 to 90/10 - which can amount to considerable savings for the community. Finally, bridge and culvert inventory data gives towns the information needed to comply with GASB 34 (Government Accounting Standards Boards - pronounced *gasbee*), which will require municipalities to report the value of their infrastructure assets, including bridges and culverts, in their annual financial reports on an accrual accounting basis. To date, NVDA has inventoried about

Cyclists touring the region now can navigate the Kingdom, courtesy of a detailed cycling map, which was produced by NVDA and NEKTA.



Photo: Bruce Burgess

10,000 bridges and culverts in nearly half of the Northeast Kingdom communities. We expect to inventory at least a dozen more communities in FY 2005.

The Route 15 corridor through Hardwick, Walden, and Danville is experiencing severe development pressure. NVDA is working closely with Lamoille County's regional planning commission to instill best management practices that preserve safe and efficient use of this stretch of highway.

The Town of Troy has embarked on two ambitious transportation initiatives with support from NVDA Transportation Planner Doug Morton. A master bicycle and pedestrian planning study, funded by NVDA, was launched in 2004. Staff developed a request for proposals on behalf of the town, and the project is currently out to bid. In addition, NVDA has assisted the town in preparing a VTRANS Enhancement grant for the village common in Troy. The scope of work includes the creation of a "gateway" at the intersection of Routes 100 and 101, a traveler's kiosk, period lighting, benches and picnic tables.

Broad Street, the highly traveled strip of Route 5 that runs through Lyndonville and the town of Lyndon, is slated for improvements and upgrades that include widening the road and creating a left-turn lane. In FY 2004, NVDA provided technical assistance to VTRANS by evaluating current access management and making specific recommendations to be implemented at construction.

NVDA continued to liaise with Rural Community Transportation (RCT) and other regional human services providers by coordinating the annual 5310 grant, which provides transportation services for the elderly and handicapped.

With the rural Northeast Kingdom accounting for nearly one-fifth of the state's land area but only one-tenth of the population, it's an irresistible attraction to cyclists. In 2004, NVDA produced detailed maps of 29 bicycling routes through Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties, representing more than 1,130 miles of paved and unpaved roads! NVDA produced the maps for an attractive and very useful brochure that was designed and distributed by the Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association (NEKTTA). More than 30,000 copies of this brochure are now available.

NVDA also continued its collaborative efforts with NEKTTA to increase private pilot tourism

to the area. In 2004, the NVDA-commissioned Airport Marketing Study was completed, resulting in the creation and distribution of four-color brochures that extol our uniquely rural beauty to private pilots within a 300-mile radius from the Northeast Kingdom. In 2005, NEKTTA will launch a "Kingdom Fly-In," a targeted promotion campaign that had been recommended in the original study.

### The Kingdom Express

"It appears the Northeast Kingdom will be cut off from the rest of Vermont and the world beyond," was how *The Caledonian-Record* announced the bad news in its front-page story.

Suffice it to say that Vermont Transit's decision to discontinue daily service between White River Junction and Newport was not taken lightly in this corner of the world.

The Greyhound subsidiary had provided the only inter-city bus service between the two towns, thus keeping the Kingdom connected with the rest of the state and major hubs in the Northeast. While the decision to cut service was a financial one, (company spokespersons cited high operating costs and low revenues from the route), it nonetheless left the Northeast Kingdom critically underserved.

Doug Morton of NVDA contacted representatives from Vermont Transit, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTRANS), Rural Community Transportation (RCT), members of the public, and both state and federal legislators. A special Transportation Advisory Committee meeting was held. While the meeting drew a respectable turnout and positive feedback, it did not appear that there would be any easy answers.

And there weren't. NVDA contacted private business owners who expressed interest in the line, but no one has come forward to date. RCT, however, did find a solution. With the help of the Vermont Agency of Transportation, RCT retired one of its older busses from regular service and recommissioned it as "The Kingdom Express," the region's only transit connection between Newport and Wells River.

This link between the Northeast Kingdom and the rest of the world remains tenuous. RCT has limited resources to provide this service and will rely heavily on ridership to cover the route's operating funds. In the meantime, NVDA will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure continued transit service to and from the Northeast Kingdom.

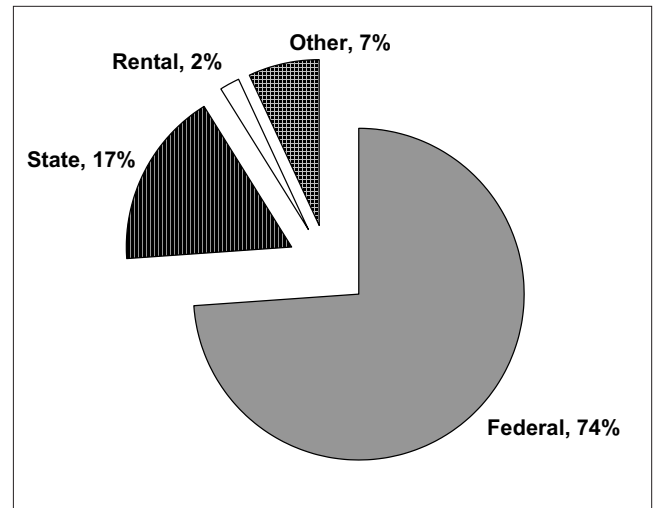
# 2004 Financial Statement\*

NVDA is supported by an annual appropriation from member towns, a share of the state's property transfer tax fund, and by private, state, and federal grants. The following statement\* was prepared by Judy Butson, Business Manager.

Our FY2004 state and federal funding sources were:

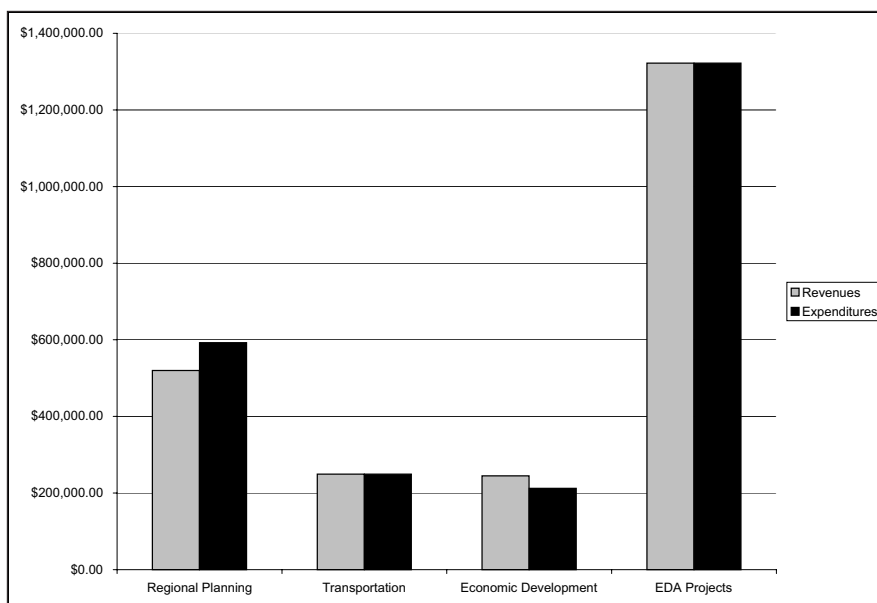
- Economic Development Administration - US Department of Commerce
- Economic Development Initiative - US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- USDA Rural Development - US Department of Agriculture
- VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- VT Department of Environmental Conservation - US Department of Environmental Protection
- VT Department of Fish and Wildlife
- VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- VT Department of Public Safety - Federal Emergency Management Agency
- VT Department of Public Safety - US Department of Homeland Security

Funding Sources FY2004\*



- VT Small Business Development Center - US Small Business Administration
- VT Agency of Transportation - US Department of Transportation

Revenues and Expenditures FY2004\*



## Regional Planning

Revenues*	\$520,000.13
Expenditures*	\$592,349.37

## Transportation

Revenues*	\$249,340.26
Expenditures*	\$249,340.26

## Economic Development

Revenues*	\$245,048.54
Expenditures*	\$212,259.68

## EDA Projects

Revenues*	\$1,322,152.44
Expenditures*	\$1,322,152.44

\*All financial figures are unaudited. Audited figures will be available in November 2004.