

# **Letter of Collaboration**

## **Resilient Right of Ways: Rural Road Vegetation Assessments**

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation  
Contact: Joanne Garton (802) 249-4217; joanne.garton@vermont.gov

This letter summarizes the collaborative work to be completed by the Urban & Community Forestry Program of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (VT FPR) located at 1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 Montpelier, VT 05620-3801 and the Town of East Montpelier with offices at 40 Kelton Road, East Montpelier, VT 05651. VT FPR will work with the Town of East Montpelier to inventory rural roadside vegetation and develop recommendations for long-term resilience of its roadside vegetation to manage stormwater runoff, maintain or improve wildlife habitat, and plan for the future of scenic and culturally important roadside hedgerows and forests, all while considering the necessary physical requirements of safe and well-maintained roads. This work will be part of the Resilient Right-of-Way Project funded by the US Forest Service.

### **1. *Issue Presented***

There are multiple challenges that prevent local adoption of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI), which includes trees, shrubs, and other herbaceous vegetation, in roadside environments. On rural back roads, existing trees can be improperly managed, interfering with road maintenance equipment and other infrastructure. Additionally, municipalities often lack the capacity to plan and care for roadside vegetation while still addressing public concerns regarding road safety, beauty, and future condition. To address these issues, we seek to build greater understanding and capacity within our communities to plan and maintain rural roadside vegetation to maximize their benefits. Municipalities engaged in proactive planning of roadside vegetation need technical resources to guide their planning and management efforts, as well as support to attain accurate data, develop and implement strategic plans, enhance management skills, and secure funds.

While communities statewide will benefit, this project will focus on only 10 communities within the Lake Champlain Basin. Priority communities have a high percentage of town-maintained unpaved roads, have relatively large acreages of stream headwaters (land over 1,500 feet elevation or acreage identified as source water protection area), and/or have identified impaired or stressed surface waters. These communities also have staff capacity and community willingness to consider cost-efficient and effective solutions that maximize road safety, comply with stormwater guidelines, maintain scenic sections of canopy roads, and are sensitive to the environmental concerns of landowners in each town. This work prioritizes assessments and strategies that focus on enhancing tree cover and promoting GSI practices in roadside environments to grow resilient right-of-ways.

### **2. *Purpose***

VT FPR will support 10 communities in Vermont to assess their roadside vegetation, including trees, and develop strategies to guide vegetation management in their towns that supports environmental, economic, and cultural values. The project will focus on two processes:

- 1) conducting a roadside vegetation assessment (both desk- and field-based) and writing of a report summarizing assessment results, and
- 2) support for towns developing action-based management plans for vegetation in their public right-of-ways, including outreach material focused on future scenarios of roadside environments typical for

each assessed town.

This is a multi-year grant project that will allow FPR to assist towns in implementing best management practices to maintain roadside vegetation. Areas of collaboration may be proposed by either institution and agreed to in writing. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Providing a record of roadside vegetation based on available GIS data to inform plans and budgets;
- Assessing roadside condition including identification of priority tree canopies in East Montpelier that support environmental or cultural goals (i.e. reduce soil erosion, protect water quality, preserve scenic vistas, and cultural heritage);
- Identifying best practices, management priorities, and plan of work to maximize public benefits from safe and healthy roadside vegetation;
- Providing educational outreach materials targeted at selectboard members, the road foreman, the conservation commission, and the public regarding best practices for both clearing and maintaining roadside vegetation;
- Scheduling a public meeting with all parties involved to share results of the assessment;
- Collaborating to develop a management plan for the town's roadside vegetation; and
- Identifying priority training needs and communicating them with VT FPR to inform the development of technical training workshops in the region.

### **3. *Representatives***

Joanne Garton will be the primary point of contact for VT FPR. Bruce Johnson, town administrator, will be the primary point of contact for East Montpelier.

### **4. *Partner Agreement***

*The Town of East Montpelier will:*

- Provide a point contact responsible for:
  - past and current community engagement with vegetation in the right-of-way in the town;
  - identifying key stakeholders in this effort;
  - aiding to determine the scope and scale of the roadside vegetation inventory;
  - being the recipient of project deliverables.
- Provide VT FPR with information specific to East Montpelier, including:
  - a current, large parcel map of the town;
  - relevant aerial maps of the town to demonstrate scope of the inventory;
  - accurate information on the extent of the public right-of-way;
  - information on past tree or vegetation inventories;
  - information on local engagement with public vegetation (including tree) management and stewardship.
- Utilize the communication channels of the East Montpelier town administrator to notify the public of key steps in the project development and invite and manage public comment.
- Determine membership of a Project Advisory Committee; convene meetings of the Project Advisory Committee with VT FPR staff and any interested members of the public to:
  - outline the project scope;
  - review results of the right-of-way vegetation assessment;
  - review the draft vegetation management plan; and

