

Town of Mount Holly – Belmont Village

Renewal Application

Complete renewal application. All requirements met.

- Cover letter and application received on 03/28/2024
- Authorization from selectboard on 10/10/2023
- Town planning process confirmed by RRPC 02/19/2018
- Provided evidence that Town Plan explains how the designation furthers the goals of the Town Plan
- The village is served by a public water system. The village is not served by a public wastewater system
- **No proposed changes to [designated boundary map](#)**

Staff Recommendation

Approve application and renew designation

March 20, 2024

Vermont Village Center Designation Program
Division for Community Planning and Revitalization Department of Housing and
Community Development (DHCD)
One National Life Drive, 6th Floor
Montpelier, VT 05620

Att: Richard Amore

Re: Renewal of Belmont Village Center Designation

The Town of Mount Holly requests that the Village Center Designation for the Village of Belmont be renewed in accord with the provisions of the Downtown Development Act. The designation was first awarded in April 2003, and renewed in 2006 and 2016. The Village of Belmont continues to contain the elements and characteristics that match the guidelines for the program. Belmont is the only surviving village of several in Mount Holly that once focused economic and social activity in the town.

History

As Mount Holly passed through the economic transitions of the mid to late 1800s from an upland agriculture, logging, and water power based manufacturing economy to a dairy farming and summer resort economy of the early to mid 1900s, its resident population declined. With the resident population decline, the town's historic villages virtually disappeared leaving as the survivor the Village of Mechanicsville. With its basic identity lost and a desire to make the village attractive to new generations of summer visitors, the name was changed from Mechanicsville to Belmont, on September 2, 1911.

Belmont, with Vermont's highest post office, offered relief for visitors during the hot months. A significant community of summer residents purchased historic properties in the village and the town, and supported its economy by staying at local hotels and renting cottages.

The summer-season addition to the resident population provided new economic life to the town that allowed the village of Belmont to survive. The most recent transition has been the end of dairy farming and the advent of a new crop of substantial four seasons recreation homes and retirement residences located on the former hayfields and pastures surrounding the village.

Belmont continues to hold its place in the Town of Mount Holly with its focal point being the Belmont General Store containing the Post Office, Star Lake, the Odd Fellows Hall, the Mount Holly Community Center with its Library and Community Room, Baptist Church, and the two properties of the Mount Holly Community Historical Museum (MHCHM) as important supporting features.

The village serves as an important activity center for the town. Fundraising suppers are held often at the Odd Fellows Hall. The library offers regular hours. The MHCHM sponsors meetings and events highlighting the heritage of the town. The Village Green is the location for a summer concert series, occasional crafts and farmers market, and other seasonal celebrations such as Cider Days.

The backbone of the Belmont Village remains the significant collection of historic properties as evidence that binds today's vitality to the commitment of two centuries of residents. The benefits of renewing the Village Center Designation continue to match the revitalization needs of Belmont.

Past Revitalization

We look forward to renewing the Village Center Designation (VCD) for Belmont and being able to continue to access the benefits of the program in support of ongoing efforts to maintain and revitalize the village.

Since the initial designation in April 2003, we have successfully applied for two street tree restoration grants. The first provided funds to retain a forester to help plan the restoration project. The second grant included a local fund and time match that exceeded the value of the actual \$4,000 tree replacement grant. All Belmont VCD property owners were contacted regarding the availability of replacement street trees, trees were planted according to the plan and with only one exception, are being maintained and are contributing to the historic character of the VCD as expected.

The Belmont VCD designation assisted the Mount Holly Community Historical Museum's (MHCHM) ambitious projects to restore the Perkins House on the Village Green, and the White Blacksmith Shop, which serves as the MHCHM's seasonal display/activity center.

The designation has also helped the Mount Holly Community Association (MHCA) and the Town of Mount Holly to secure assistance for the maintenance of the Community Center that houses the Town Library, and supported an ambitious fundraising effort that led to the restoration/development of the Community Center basement as a new Community Room with kitchen and restroom. The Community

Room supports a year round calendar of classes, activities, gatherings, and events that enrich the village and the town.

Noted in the 2011 renewal application was the need to "... rebuild/restore the Star Lake dam and recreation area." As also noted in the prior renewal, a generous \$500,000 gift was made to stimulate the dam reconstruction and adjacent recreation area. These projects were completed December 23, 2015. The water level of Star Lake has been raised by eighteen inches to its traditional level in compliance with State and Federal requirements. More than two hundred donations were received by the Friends of Star Lake to ensure the completion of the project.

Current Revitalization

A fiscal year 2022 municipal planning grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development funded a community vision survey and the creation of a Belmont Village Master Plan. This Master Plan was incorporated into the recently adopted Town Plan by reference.

In January 2024, the town accepted an award of a municipal planning grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development and plans to create a housing needs assessment and action plan. Some of this work will center on improving housing options in the village.

A new owner of the Belmont General Store has initiated an extensive revitalization of the store—addressing decades of deferred maintenance—and has promised the store will return to its place as the center of the community.

This coming summer, Mount Holly Conservation Trust will fund Arrowwood Environmental performing an ecological study of Star Lake.

Municipal Infrastructure

The Village has an extremely antiquated water system called the Mechanicsville Aqueduct. At one time, this spring fed water system supplied most or all of the homes in the village. Almost all of those homes and businesses have drilled their own wells. Since Belmont does not have a wastewater system, these wells are now in potential conflict with the in-ground wastewater systems on small individual lots. In a 2023 mailed survey of Belmont area property owners, over two-thirds of respondents agreed that the town should seek grant funding for a village wastewater feasibility study. In addition to concerns surrounding the lack of a village wastewater system, the village has aging stormwater infrastructure that is in need of redesign and replacement.

Maps

Since this application is a renewal we are not supplying a new village designation boundary map. However, we would like to indicate our interest in revising the designation boundaries in the future to more clearly follow parcel boundaries.

Renewal Checklist

Attached to this cover letter are the following:

1. Excerpts from our recently adopted Town Plan
2. Minutes from the October 10, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Mount Holly Select Board showing authorization for the renewal.
3. A letter from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission stating that our planning process is “confirmed” under 24 V.S.A. §4350. (Note: the RRPC will be reviewing our updated Town Plan on April 16, 2024.)
4. Village Center map from the recently adopted Mount Holly Town Plan

I believe that the application is complete and provides the information listed in the Renewal Checklist. Should there be any questions please contact Jon McCann, 1376 Summit Rd, Mount Holly, Vermont 05758, 802-259-2401, william.jon.mccann@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



William Jon McCann

Excerpts Mount Holly Town Plan

Adopted February 13, 2024

Pages 25–27:

C. Village and Municipal Centers

Mount Holly today has two primary focal points of population and services: the Village of Belmont and the Municipal Center.

The Village of Belmont is a historical settlement that was known as Mechanicsville before the year 1911. It is centered at the intersection of Belmont Road, Tarbellville Road, Maple Hill Road, and Church Street. The village consists of many historic buildings serving commercial, civil, social, and residential uses.

The Village is and shall continue to be a hub of social and economic activity. It hosts the town's only general store, library, community center, museum, church, Odd Fellows Hall, village green, park, and public swimming area.

The Village earned a Vermont Village Center Designation in 2003 that was renewed in 2016. It is due for renewal by April 2024. Benefits of the program include priority consideration for state grants, eligibility for Neighborhood Development Areas, and a variety of tax credits for revitalization and improvements. These incentives are an important factor in maintaining and enhancing the traditional Vermont development pattern of a compact village center surrounded by rural countryside, attracting new businesses and vitality to the community, and meeting the land use goals of this Plan.

The town shall renew and maintain the Belmont Village Center Designation.

The current boundary of the village center designation does not follow parcel boundary lines, nor does it encompass the entire public park, and it does not include much easily developable land.

The town should encourage the state to expand and realign the village center designation boundary.

One of the key advantages of a village center is having services and amenities within easy walking distance. Efforts should be made to enhance safe and accessible pedestrian travel within the village center with sidewalks.

The town should develop a Belmont village pedestrian travel plan.

Bicycle riding is an increasingly popular form of recreation in the town, as well as a good way to get exercise and reduce automobile use while doing errands.

The town should consider bicycle safety as part of its village travel plan.

Enhanced public parking that fits the character of the Village has been identified as necessary for the revitalization of the general store and the Village as a whole. Wherever possible, on-street parking should be encouraged over designated parking lots. Locating utility lines underground and re-locating storm drains, particularly in the approaches to the Belmont/Tarbellville/Maple Hill/Church intersection, should be pursued.

The town should develop a Belmont village parking plan.

Residential uses including, but not limited to, single-family and multi-family dwellings as well as small, low-impact commercial operations with appropriate buffering in keeping with the village character shall be encouraged. Development should be compact and should provide certain amenities, such as public spaces, to keep Belmont Village an attractive and comfortable place in which to live.

New development within Belmont Village must provide for landscaping and natural screening and maximize possibilities for pedestrian and bicycle travel. The intent of this is to encourage a mixture of residential and commercial development in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will contribute to the economic vitality of Mount Holly while preserving a sense of proportion in the Village Center. New development should also be designed to include shared green space, driveways, parking, and water and septic systems.

The desired development density and vitality may be difficult to achieve because the Village does not have a public water supply or wastewater disposal system. The land use pattern of the village, consisting of very small lots, makes it a challenge for owners to provide and maintain both on-site wells and wastewater disposal. This has proven to be a barrier to growth and has reduced the vitality of the community. See also Water and Wastewater.

Whenever possible, public investments and state and federal funding/grants shall be utilized to make improvements to, create new, or expand existing infrastructure within Belmont Village. These investments shall be made to support the existing character of the Village, as well as planned growth.

The town should investigate the impact of re-establishing historical hamlets or establishing new village areas. Possible areas include East Wallingford, Mount Holly, or Hortonville.

The Belmont Village Plan, produced through a FY2022 Municipal Planning Grant, is incorporated into this Plan by reference.

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With a village center designation from the Vermont Downtown Board, the town has the option to pursue a Neighborhood Development Area (NDA) designation. This designation allows developers of residential projects exemption from Act 250 permitting and other incentives to develop walkable residential neighborhoods near the village center.

The town should work with landowners and developers to identify areas within walking distance of the Village Center that can be developed for new or infill housing that doesn't contribute to sprawl.

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Village Center Designation – Part of Belmont is currently designated as a Village Center by the State of Vermont. The designation shall be renewed every eight years to carry out goals and action items of this plan and to support land use goals of the State of Vermont, encouraging compact centers surrounded by rural working lands. It is a goal of this Plan to maintain this designation.

**Select Board Meeting
Town Office
October 10, 2023, 6:30 pm**

MINUTES

Attendance: Caitlin Boyle, Mark Turco, Diana Garrow, MariAnne McGee (via Zoom), Diane Deegan (via Zoom), Randall Dapron (via Zoom), Faith Tempest (via Zoom), Billy Austin, Tiffany Norton, Carol Garrow-Woolley, Lori Norton, James Seward, Christine Pratt, Dennis Devereux, Russ Garrow, Clinton Woolley, Elizabeth Karle, Zena Gates, David Johnson, Stephen Michel, Ted Crawford, Barbara Hazelton, Steve Hazelton, Anna McGee Hanson, Mark Shea, Grant Thurston, Erik Hanson, Katherine Heald, Amy Turco, Mary Surething, Philippe Crane, Andrew Shulz, Jon McCann

1. **Call to Order at 6:35 pm**
2. **Pledge of Allegiance**
3. **Consideration of Any Changes to the Agenda.** None.
4. **Approval of September 12 Minutes.** Diana Garrow made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted; Mark Tuco seconded; unanimously approved.
5. **Reports**
 - a. **Highways & Transfer Station Update:** Road Foreman Clinton Woolley noted that the town needs new radios for the highway crew; he received a quote from CVC Paging for up to nine new radios, including radios for each truck and two base stations. The quote is \$3,132/year. Mr. Turco noted that the PACIF equipment grant, and/or ARPA funding may be able to cover the cost. Mr. Clinton further reported that paving is done with the exception of shoulders. Mr. Clinton also received a quote for new guardrails for Healdville Road/Branch Brook Road; VT Rec sent the lowest quote.
 - i. **Summit Road Culvert Update:** The project is complete. The remaining guardrail will be installed by G&N Excavating's subcontractor, VT Rec.
 - ii. **Response to VT Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC):** Select Board Clerk Caitlin Boyle noted that the Town submitted its response to the state DEC, in reply to its inspection of the Transfer Station. The Town is now in compliance with the state's requirements. New signage has been installed at the swap shed, recycling compactor and shed, and a summary of disposal guidelines has been posted to the Post Offices, Town Office, Newsflash and Chit Chat. Awesome Graphics provided a quote for a new burn pile sign at \$146.50. Mark Turco made a motion to approve the signage expenses as quoted; Diana Garrow seconded; unanimously approved.
 - b. **Treasurer Monthly Income & Expense Report:** Town Treasurer Liz Karle noted that property taxes continue to come in. Transfer Station sticker purchases have also remained steady, even at the higher price point. Ms. Karle has continued to document and compile flood-related expenses for FEMA reimbursement and has met with the Town's FEMA liaison; FEMA reimbursement will not be affected by a potential federal government shutdown.
 - i. **Banking Updates:** Ms. Karle reported that she has consolidated and moved funds within the Town's existing bank to take advantage of the best interest rates. She estimated the Town will gain ~\$150,000 in interest as a result of the changes and current rates.
 - ii. **FY Audit Report:** The town's auditing firm has completed audited financial statements for FY22, and the report has determined that the Town is in good financial health.
 - c. **Lister's Update**
 - i. **Errors and Omissions:** There is one request from a single property owner for an error and omission. Diana Garrow made a motion to accept the Errors and Omissions certificate as presented; Mark Turco second; unanimously approved.

- ii. **Maintenance Agreement:** Lister David Johnson presented the Select Board with a new Maintenance Agreement from NEMRC. Mr. Turco made a motion to renew the assessor's service agreement for FY24. Diana Garrow seconded; unanimously approved.
- d. **Mount Holly Planning Commission Update:** Jon McCann noted that the Planning Commission has completed its draft of the Town Plan and will hold a public hearing at 6:00 PM on November 15, 2023, at the Mount Holly Town Office and via Zoom, to solicit public comment on the proposed plan.
- e. **Mount Holly Conservation Commission Update:** The MHCC had a successful recycling education booth at Cider Days. They are considering opportunities to apply for grants through the RCSWD and Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program.

6. New Business

- a. **Open Transfer Station Bids:** The Town received two bids for collection and disposal of solid waste, recycling and other materials from the Transfer Station, from Casella Waste and from Hubbard Brothers. Complete bid details are available for review at the Town Office. Mr. Turco noted that the Select Board will need to review the bids more carefully to make an apples-to-apples comparison of each vendor's quotes for collection and disposal of mixed solid waste, Zero-Sort recycling, compost, and scrap metal. A decision will be made at the next regular meeting. Apart from submitting their bid, Hubbard Brothers also asked whether the Town would be interested in selling the two empty 30-yard waste containers that have been unused at the transfer station for several years. They'd like to offer the Town \$2,400 to purchase them, if the Town agrees. Randy Dapron at Casella Waste noted that the containers may belong to Casella; he will review his records to check on ownership. Mark Turco made a motion to sell the containers to Hubbard Brothers for \$2,400, conditional on Town ownership; Diana Garrow seconded; unanimously approved. Mr. Woolley will also determine whether the Town owns the containers and will report back.
- b. **FY24 Municipal Planning Grant - Housing Study:** Treasurer Liz Karle recommended that the Town apply to the FY24 MPG to perform a housing study that would survey the town's housing. Mr. Turco noted that the Select Board would meet Tuesday, October 17 at 6:30 pm to discuss whether or not to pursue the grant.
- c. **Social Services Policy:** Select Board Clerk Caitlin Boyle noted that the Town does not have a recorded policy to describe the Town's approval of social services requests for the annual town meeting. Mr. Turco noted that the Clerk can draft a policy using other town policies as a guide, for discussion and/or approval at the next regular meeting.
- d. **.Gov Domain Registration.** Ms. Karle noted that the Town is entitled, as a municipality, to request a .gov website domain. Ms. Karle has prepared a draft request for the Select Board's review. Ms. Garrow made a motion to request that mthollyvt.gov be delegated to the Town; Mark Turco seconded; unanimously approved.
- e. **Renewal of Town Employee Health Insurance and Health Reimbursement Accounts.** Renewals for town employee health insurance and health reimbursement accounts are due before the end of the year. Monthly costs for health insurance premiums for all covered Town employees in November 2023 were \$5,778.34. Estimated costs for the same plan for 2024 are \$6,580.35—a ~13.9% increase (\$802.01), assuming the same needs for coverage, and the same plan. Mark Turco made a motion to renew the policies as estimated; Diana Garrow seconded; unanimously approved.
- f. **Belmont Village Designation Renewal.** The Select Board discussed the need for renewal of the Belmont Historic Village Designation. Diana Garrow made a motion to apply to renew the designation; Mark Turco seconded; unanimously approved.

7. Ongoing & Old Business

- a. **Rutland County Solid Waste District Update.** Mark Shea reported on the RCSWD's outreach grant, which supported their survey of residents regarding recycling, composting and other solid waste diversion activities in Town.
- b. **TH17 Bridge Project - Feedback to State.** VTrans has completed work on the conceptual plans for the reconstruction of the Bowlsville Bridge. The state will accept Town feedback on the plans through October 20, 2023. The next step in the process is to progress the plans and work on obtaining the necessary permits and ROW required for the project. Affected property owners have been contacted by the Select Board to solicit feedback and questions.
- c. **VEM Hazard Mitigation Program Update.** Three property owners are considering the VEM Hazard Mitigation flood buyout offer. Jeff Chase will continue to follow up with all three property owners to determine whether they will go forward with the buyout process. If the property owners decide to move forward, a board member needs to be appointed to be the authorized agent for the VEM Hazard Mitigation property buyouts; Mr. Chase noted he is willing to be that agent if needed. Mr. Turco made a motion to appoint Jeff Chase as the authorized agent; Diana Garrow seconded; unanimously approved.
- d. **Mount Holly Volunteer Rescue Squad Update.** Mr. Turco asked MHVRS to provide an update regarding its budget for, and intention to operate under the auspices of, a new, 501(c)(3) entity that will provide emergency medical services (EMS) to Town residents through both volunteer first responders as well as paid, daytime staff.
 - i. Anna McGee Hanson noted that the budget for the new organization is still being deliberated and is not yet final.
 - ii. Ms. Garrow noted that she had only received one page of the organization's Articles of Incorporation and asked if there were more. Ms. McGee Hanson noted that the Articles were only one page and asked if the Select Board would like to read the full bylaws. Ms. Garrow asked for those to be provided.
 - iii. Mr. Turco shared a draft proposal for the possible provision of EMS services via Ludlow Ambulance Service, as an alternative to EMS services being provided for by a local rescue squad. Marianne McGee noted her concerns regarding the possibility of shifting to a Ludlow-based ambulance service, which may take longer to respond to calls than a local service, citing the concept of the "golden hour" of time that is optimal for emergency response.
 - iv. Erik Hanson noted that as of last week, MHVRS is staffed during the day by a paid first responder. He and Ms. McGee Hanson noted that response rates by the MHVRS squad have been at ~30% in the last year, due to a decrease in volunteers and an increase in call volume. He noted that Rutland Regional Ambulance Service is also understaffed.
 - v. Ted Crawford noted that he has concerns regarding the details of the MHVRS's transition to a new 501(c)(3), and in particular, that the transition to a new entity was not shared openly with the Town government or residents prior to the change. He noted that many residents are unaware of the changes, or confused about them, and that he would be interested in seeing minutes for the last two years of MHVRS's minutes. Mary Surething noted that she agreed that Town residents need more transparency regarding potential organizational changes and costs for the rescue service. Steve Hazelton added that his background is in EMS, and that in his experience of volunteer squads that have shifted to a system of paid, daytime help, the shift can lead to additional overtime costs, and squads can struggle with the increased need for organizational management, among other concerns.
 - vi. Mr. Turco asked that a special meeting be scheduled to discuss the provision of emergency medical services in Mount Holly. Mr. Turco proposed that this meeting be held on November 21 at 6:30 pm.

- vii. Amy Turco noted that she suffered a personal loss recently; no local EMS responded to the 911 call; she asked that the MHVRS take a broader view of the issue to consider the impact not only on the rescue squad, but on the community. Ms. McGee Hanson and Mr. Hanson noted that they agree with Ms. Turco's concerns regarding response rates; the organizational changes they have initiated are intended to respond to that concern. Zena Gates also expressed her dismay with the MHVRS's lack of response to her 911 calls.
- viii. Katherine Heald asked how the meeting on November 21 would be advertised so as to promote broad attendance by Town residents. Mr. Turco noted that it would be published in the Vermont Journal, in addition to the Chit Chat, Newsflash and public posting sites. He confirmed that Jim Finger at Rutland Regional would be invited to attend, as would a representative from Ludlow Ambulance Service. He asked that no further comment be made at this meeting, and that residents with questions and concerns attend the future meeting.
- ix. Diana Garrow noted her gratitude for the MHVRS's efforts over the years.
- e. **Dam Inspection Report.** The state's post-flood inspection of the dam has been received. No action is needed at this time.
- f. **Junk Ordinance Complaints:** The Select Board received one complaint regarding a property on Shunpike Road. The Select Board Clerk will prepare a letter informing the property owner of the updated junk ordinance, his apparent violation of the ordinance, and the new fee schedule for violations.

8. Citizen Comments

- a. Joan Connor noted the need for handicapped-accessible parking at the Belmont Store, if and when it reopens.

9. Announcements. None.

10. Review & Sign Orders.

11. Executive Session: Title 1 V.S.A. S 313. None.

12. Adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Caitlin Boyle
Select Board Clerk



RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

March 27, 2024

Jon McCann, Planning Commission Chair
Town of Mount Holly
50 School Street
Mount Holly, Vermont 05758

RE: Confirmation of Planning Process for Village Center Designation Renewal

Dear Mr. McCann:

This letter serves as the official confirmation of the Town of Mount Holly's planning process required for the Village Center Designation Renewal.

Per 24 V.S.A. § 4350, Mount Holly's Town Plan, duly adopted on February 19, 2018, was reviewed and approved by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission.

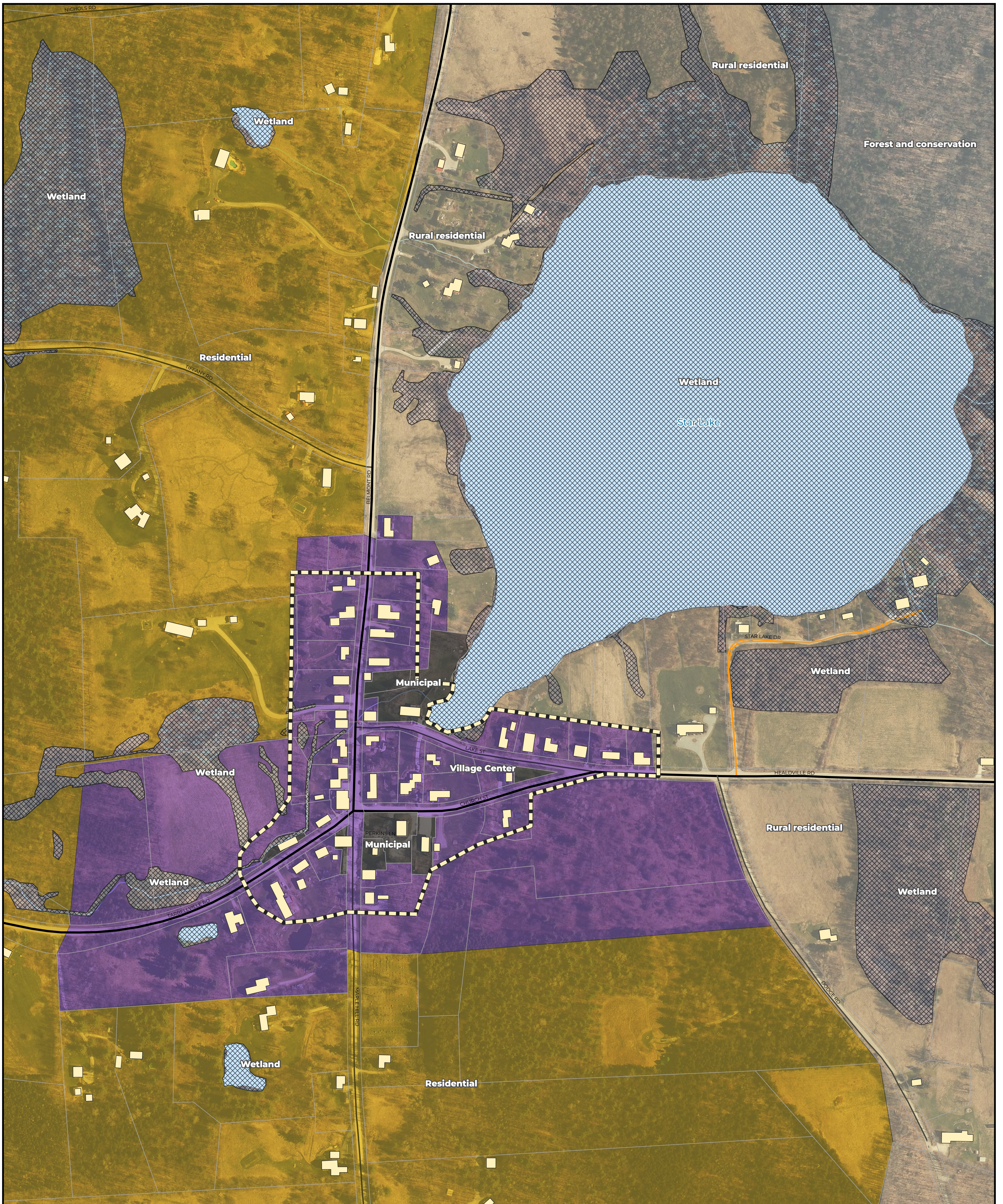
Sustainable growth in our historic Village Centers is crucial for the continued success of the Rutland Region. The RRPC strongly supports this application for Village Center Designation Renewal and believes the designation will continue to provide community and economic development benefits to Mount Holly and the entire Rutland Region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Devon Neary". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Devon Neary
Executive Director
Rutland Regional Planning Commission



Village Center

Mount Holly, Vermont – 2023

Scale 1:2,000



Future Land use

- Forest and conservation
- Rural residential
- Residential
- Village Center
- Municipal
- Wetland and riparian

Village Center Designation boundary

- Parcel boundary
- Structure