



Poultney; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Vermont Planning Manual

Module 1: The Municipal Plan

Agency of Commerce and Community Development

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About This Guide:

This is **Module 1** of the Vermont Planning and Land Use Series. Developed in accordance with Sec. 4304 of Title 24, this series seeks to inform and empower municipal officials and citizen planners to promote vibrant communities through best practices in planning and land use. This manual was revised in the early days of implementing the Act 181 (2024) requirements. It will be updated as new information and processes are available.

Other modules in this series:

Module 2: *State Designation Programs*. Guidance and case studies on state designation programs and how they help communities achieve more vibrant communities. Last updated June 2025.

Module 3: *Enabling Better Places Through Incremental Local Bylaw Reform*. Small but powerful steps to reform local zoning and increase housing opportunities in downtowns, villages, and neighborhoods. Last updated June 2025.



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Chapter 1. Introduction

This Edition of the Vermont Planning Manual, Module 1:

- Helps communities make plans that are user-friendly and concise;
- Presents a new approach to creating a vision that clearly identifies where and what communities want to maintain, evolve, or transform;
- Focuses on what matters most — identifying the actions that will turn that vision into reality.

What if we already have a plan?

86 percent of Vermont municipalities already have a plan and are not starting from scratch. This module provides up-to-date information and guidance whether you are completely overhauling the plan or adopting a minor amendment. We've even included a chapter to help you evaluate your existing plan.



1.1. Why Do We Plan?



Saxtons River; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Vermont's municipalities bear the essential responsibility of planning for economic development, housing, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. Since the earliest settlements, the state's geography—including its topography, waterways, soils, and natural resources—has significantly influenced community formation and growth.

Historically, development in Vermont was largely driven by private initiative with minimal state oversight. However, as the impacts of uncoordinated growth became evident, municipalities recognized the need for a more strategic approach—one that addresses long-term needs, environmental protection, and sustainable development.

Municipal planning provides a proactive framework to guide development, align individual efforts, and measure progress toward collective objectives. A well-considered plan enables informed decision-making that supports a unified community vision. In the absence of such guidance, short-term or fragmented decisions risk undermining quality of life, increasing tax burdens, and causing inefficient use of resources.

Although often underappreciated, municipal plans play a critical role in sustaining infrastructure, attracting residents and businesses, and supporting essential community institutions. A thoughtfully developed plan serves as a vital tool for resilience, enabling Vermont communities to preserve their distinct character while effectively preparing for future challenges.



A Few Compelling Reasons for Planning:

- Vermont's rapidly changing climate poses growing risks to communities. Without a plan, it's hard to respond effectively and ensure resources are ready. While flood resilience and hazard mitigation plans address some impacts, towns must also prepare for other risks—like extreme heat, wildfires, poor air quality, and the needs of vulnerable populations.
- Vermont's population is aging, and there's not enough housing to meet current demand or future need. Young families, older Vermonters, and people in need can't find affordable places to live. For the first time, communities are being asked to set specific targets for adding new housing.
- Frequent shifts in federal and state funding priorities mean that municipalities can no longer depend on these sources to supplement local tax revenues to maintain roads, bridges, schools, affordable housing and disaster response.
- Planning best serves a community when it is conducted via an open and inclusive process that is accountable and accessible to current and future residents.

How to Develop a Plan:

In many towns, volunteer planning commissions take on work typically handled by professional staff in larger communities. While creating a municipal plan can be challenging, this module aims to make the process more manageable.

Challenging tasks are made easier when broken down into manageable pieces. For this reason, this edition of the Municipal Planning Manual, Module 1 presents a 5-step process to help communities create clear, actionable plans that won't end up just sitting on a shelf. It describes how to:

- Create a shared vision of what the community would like to maintain, evolve or transform over time;
- Prioritize realistic and achievable implementation actions and link them to programs that support implementation;
- Provide guidance on how to evaluate existing plans and identify ways to make them better.

At its best, community planning is a collaborative effort that addresses current needs while preparing for the future. It creates a clear framework for setting priorities and guiding action. *This is the purpose of municipal planning: to build a roadmap that helps current and future generations live, work, play, and thrive in Vermont.*



Communicating Planning's Importance to Everyone in Your Community:

1. Paints a Clear Picture of the Future

Residents, institutions, and businesses want to understand their community's key challenges and future direction. They want to know whether it will stay mostly rural, grow around a strong town center, or both. Developing a shared vision helps people unite, set goals, and track progress over time.

2. Makes or Strengthens Great Places

Vermont already offers many great places to live, work, and enjoy. To maintain, improve, and revitalize these places, communities must take intentional action.

Modern technology allows more people to live and work anywhere, often choosing a location first, then finding work or working remotely. They seek a high quality of life supported by strong built, cultural, and natural environments. Walkable neighborhoods and unique, complete, and connected communities appeal more than generic, car-centered suburbs. Your plan is essential to creating and sustaining these great places.



Wilmington; Image Credit: DHCD

3. Establishes Transparent, Consistent, and Predictable Public Policy

When businesses or residents want to expand, relocate, or invest in a Vermont community, they should be able to easily review and understand the local plan, policies, and regulations to understand where and what they can build. A clear vision and plan create a solid foundation for the local regulations that people understand and trust to match their expectations for change.

4. Promotes Wise Investments and Helps Manage Future Costs

Vermonters want strong public services, a high quality of life, and low taxes. Without a clear plan, communities risk poor services, neglected infrastructure, and costly loss or replacement of amenities. Sprawling, unplanned development may initially feel rural and low maintenance, but over time, leads to high costs for extending and maintaining services.

Planning helps manage these costs by focusing development where community services can be delivered efficiently. This way, every public and private investment can produce greater social and economic benefits.



1.2. What is a Municipal Plan?

The **comprehensive municipal plan** defines a community's vision and guides how to achieve it. It shapes public investments, land use rules, and tools like designated downtowns, village centers, business districts, and conservation programs. It can also help the community qualify for state grants and technical support.

Municipal Plans Can Be Used As:

A long-term guide

The plan can be used to measure and evaluate public and private initiatives that affect the future physical, social, and economic health of the community.

A basis for decision-making, community programs, and taxpayer investments

The plan can help identify priorities for funding, establish a capital improvement program and prepare a municipal capital budget, and direct other public and private local initiatives, such as farmland protection, housing development, or recreational facilities creation or improvement.

An action plan that identifies implementation steps

The plan details the programs and projects over the short term (one to two years), mid-term (three to five years), and long-term (six years or more) to achieve goals and objectives. Well-articulated implementation strategies can help leverage grant funding and other support for those actions.

A basis for municipal regulations

The plan serves as the foundation for zoning and subdivision regulations and bylaws to guide development. It informs plans for transportation and other public infrastructure investments and guides local regulatory decisions.

A source of information

The plan offers key data on population trends, the economy, housing, infrastructure, and important historic and natural resources. Clear, organized information helps local boards, residents, businesses, and state or local groups make informed decisions.

A source for strategic planning and studies

Few plans can address every issue in sufficient detail. Therefore, municipal plans often recommend further studies to develop policies or strategies to meet specific needs like creating more housing or managing stormwater.



Cambridge; Image Credit: DuBois & King



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A tool for coordination

Municipal plans help share a community's vision with regional, intermunicipal, and state plans and programs. They should align with the capital planning process to reflect shared budget priorities over the same timeframe.

A source for community standards in state regulatory proceedings

Act 250, Vermont's statewide land use law, the Section 248 permitting process for energy projects, and other state regulatory processes may give added weight to policies spelled out in municipal plans as part of the permit process described in [Appendix 2](#).

Eight-Year Plan, 20-Year Vision

Many municipal plans have thorough inventories describing the present but do not adequately address what the municipality strives to be in the future, nor do they state specific policies or programs to help residents make their desired future a reality. Imagine beyond the eight-year term and plan for what you want your community to be like in 20 years.

Municipal Plans in Vermont Are Necessary to:

Empower local decisions by authorizing towns to adopt

- Zoning bylaws (permitting rules)
- Subdivision regulations
- Flood-hazard and other free-standing regulations
- A capital budget and program, which enables charging impact fees

Influence state regulatory proceedings

- Act 250 applications must conform to the municipal plan
- While applications for a Section 248 Certificate of Public Good must give due consideration to energy policies adopted in the municipal plan, local plans that meet additional requirements can have a stronger role in influencing decisions of the Public Utility Commission.

Qualify for state and federal funding sources, including

- Municipal planning grants*
- Downtown and village tax credits (and other benefits of State designation)*
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities funding
- Brownfield redevelopment funds
- Community and economic development and affordable housing funds

*Some benefits of state designation programs require a confirmed planning process that includes approval of the municipal plan by the regional planning commission. See Module 2 for details.



1.3. Statewide and Regional Planning



Danville; Image Credit: DuBois & King

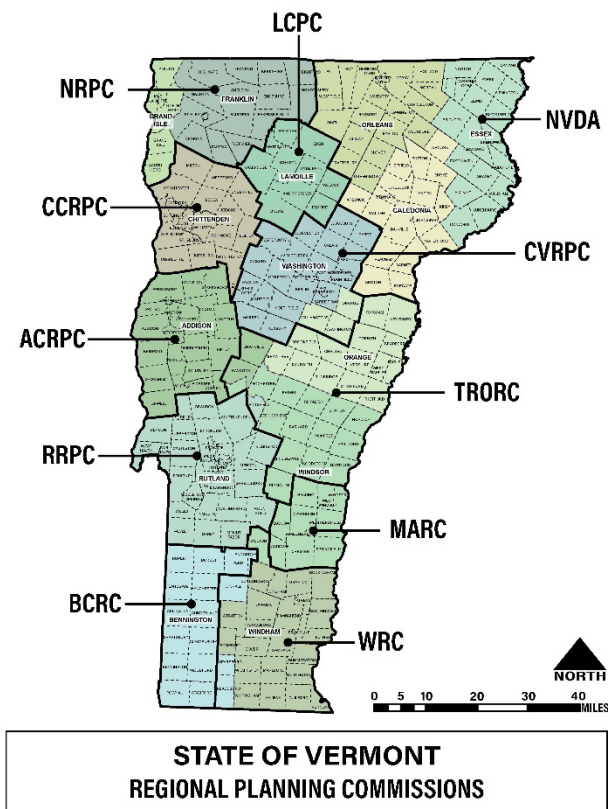
1.3.1. State Level Plans

Some state agencies adopt plans that affect local and regional planning, whether in response to federal agency requirements or to assist statewide goals. For example:

- State transportation plans to improve the reliability of transportation networks (Vermont Agency of Transportation)
- The Hazard Mitigation Plan, to reduce threats to public safety (Vermont Emergency Management)
- Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan, to guide how Vermont will meet its energy needs (Vermont Department of Public Service)
- The HUD Consolidated Plan, to guide investments in housing and economic development (Department of Housing and Community Development)
- Tactical Basin Plans that identify investments to improve water quality (Department of Environmental Conservation)



1.3.2. Regional Planning



Each of Vermont's 11 Regional Planning Commissions adopts a plan similar to municipal plans. Under state law, a municipal plan is compatible with the regional or neighboring municipality's plan and the plans of adjoining municipalities if it does not significantly interfere with their goals.

Vermont law also allows a municipality to adopt all or part of a regional plan as its own, though this is rarely used. Regional plans are sometimes designed to help simplify local plans by providing data, analysis, and recommendations on broader issues like housing, energy, economic growth, and transportation. This lets towns focus their plans on land use, local priorities, and community goals.

Recent changes to state law (such as Act 181 of 2024) have increased coordination between the regional planning commissions and municipalities. Regional future land use maps now use standardized categories statewide,

with those showing centers and neighborhoods linked to specific benefits (see [Step 4](#)). Updates also affect state designation programs and how Act 250 applies in different areas. As a result, aligning your municipal plan and land use bylaws with regional and state goals—such as housing, conservation, and infrastructure—is more important than ever. Your regional planning commission is your essential partner throughout this process.

1.3.3. Statewide Planning Goals

Vermont statute ([24 V.S.A. § 4302](#)) includes 15 planning goals to which all municipal, regional, and state plans must advance. While the goals are discussed throughout this module, this [checklist](#) provides all the goals in one place, and can help you track whether your plan is consistent with the state planning goals.

To be approved by the regional planning commission, local plans must be consistent with the statewide planning goals, meaning: the local plan is making substantial progress toward attainment of regional plan goals. Regional planning commissions evaluate local plans at least twice during the 8-year plan cycle, and consult with the municipalities to discuss the results. The first consultation typically occurs at the regional approval



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process, which requires a public hearing. The other consultation typically occurs 18 to 24 months prior to the municipal plan update. However, the regional planning commissions are always available to meet with and give the local planning commission guidance on inconsistencies and opportunities to improve the plan and assure regional approval.

Smart Growth Principles

One of the state planning goals is to have development follow smart growth principles. The 10 smart growth principles are:

1. Mix land uses
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable neighborhoods
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

1.3.4. Coordination Across Different Levels of Planning in Vermont

To summarize the various planning levels:

State Planning Goals

- The state has 15 specific planning goals. (See [Appendix 1](#))

Regional Plans

- Regional plans must be consistent with the state planning goals. They must also define the future land uses within the region, in accordance with specific land use categories and methodologies outlined in statute.

Municipal Plans

- To have a regionally approved plan, municipal plans must be **compatible** with the regional plan, and **consistent** with the 15 state planning goals.

***“Consistent”** and **“compatible”** are defined in statute. (24 V.S.A. §4302) **“Consistent”** means that the plan must make substantial progress toward attainment of the goals. **“Compatible”** means that the plan as implemented will not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other plan.*



1.4. Actors and Roles in the Planning Process

There are multiple people and groups that will be part of the planning process, from a lead role to providing input to final approval.

1.4.1. The Planning Commission

The planning commission is responsible for preparing, updating, and distributing the plan, holding public hearings on the plan, and submitting it to the legislative body (either the selectboard, city council, or board of trustees) for consideration. Specific requirements for plan preparation and adoption are listed in [Appendix 1](#).

As part of the process, the planning commission must solicit public input, weigh options, and recommend policy decisions that will chart the community's future, which may eventually have the force and effect of law. For these reasons, planning commission members must always act in the public interest, and put the general welfare of the community above any personal interests.



1.4.2. The Legislative Body

By state statute, the legislative body must review, hold public hearings, and adopt the plan. They may revise the draft plan as allowed by statute.

Their role extends beyond legal responsibilities. When a plan proposes major changes, elected officials must lead—explaining the vision and rallying public support, especially when residents feel uncertain. Their leadership is also crucial during implementation, such as updating zoning bylaws to align with the plan's vision, allocating budgets for staff and planning costs, and securing bonds for new municipal infrastructure and facilities that may be referenced in the plan.

1.4.3. Municipal Boards

Other municipal boards may have a role in drafting sections of the plan. For example, the conservation commission may be involved in developing priorities around natural resources and land use. An energy committee may suggest specific targets for energy saving, and for local renewable energy generation. Housing committees may propose



goals and objectives for the quantity, types and sizes of housing that would best meet the town's needs and regional housing targets.

1.4.4. The Community

Community involvement is key to building a plan that reflects local visions and goals and earns public support. Everyone has the right to help shape the plan's policies, goals, and main ideas. Planning commissions and local leaders must provide clear and accurate information, ensuring that all residents—including those without formal influence or organized groups—can participate in the process. (See “Developing Strategies to Inform and Invite Engagement”.)

Ethical Principles in Planning

The American Planning Association has produced a guide outlining [ethical principles to guide participants in the planning process](#).

Municipal staff and local boards should:

- Recognize the rights of citizens to participate in planning decisions;
- Strive to give citizens (including those who lack formal organization or influence) full, clear, and accurate information on planning issues and the opportunity to have a meaningful role in the development of plans and programs;
- Strive to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons;
- Assist in the clarification of community goals, objectives, and policies in plan-making;
- Ensure that reports, records and any other non- confidential information that is, or will be, available to decision-makers is made available to the public in a convenient format and sufficiently in advance of any decision;
- Strive to protect the integrity of the natural environment and the heritage of the built environment;
- Pay special attention to the interrelatedness of decisions and the long-range consequences of present actions.



1.5. Key Elements of a Successful Planning Process



Bolton; Image Credit: DHCD

Even when all the actors involved in the planning process play their parts, plans can fail to deliver the expected results. There are four critical factors that will ensure your municipal plan is successfully implemented:

Diverse Viewpoints

Developing a community plan that truly reflects local values requires thoughtful leadership from the planning commission. To ensure the process is inclusive and representative, it's essential to recruit commission members who reflect the diverse values, concerns, and interests of the entire community.

Members should come from a wide range of backgrounds—geographic, economic, and professional. This includes individuals from planning-related fields such as architecture, development, law, and engineering, as well as residents from different neighborhoods and community sectors. A commission composed of people from varied experiences and perspectives helps ensure that all voices are heard and that the resulting plan serves the whole community.

Community Participation

Getting broad participation and support is challenging, but vital to a plan's long-term success. Holding a few public meetings advertised in the local paper is not enough. The planning process takes time and should offer many ways for people to share ideas,



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concerns, and feedback. When people feel heard and involved, they're more likely to support the plan. Include local officials—like those on zoning boards, conservation commissions, or even listers and the town clerk. Reach out to business owners, schools, hospitals, and community groups, especially those who don't usually attend public meetings and can reach other sectors of the community.

Communication and Listening Skills

Mapping, customizing, and adopting the plan require many decisions. The community must carefully balance its needs with those of individual property owners. Leaders who listen well and communicate clearly help build agreement around tough decisions. They stay aware of community values and concerns, speak plainly, welcome honest talks, and adjust expectations as needed. Trust and open-mindedness are key, as well as knowing how to adjust and align expectations.

Get Outside Help

If your community needs help with the plan, your [Regional Planning Commission](#) (RPC) can assist. RPC staff have extensive planning experience, and know how to get plans approved and goals implemented. They can help you explore options and find needed resources. Private consultants are also available, and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) maintains a [list of consultants](#) interested in working with Vermont towns on planning projects. Your town may qualify for a [municipal planning grant](#) from DHCD to help cover costs. Consider setting up a local planning reserve fund to hire expert help, or to match grant funds.

How Can a Professional Consultant Help Us?

Professional planners can:

- Provide technical expertise in mapping, data analysis, and modeling;
- Coordinate public outreach, communications, and support for groups and individuals;
- Draft goals, policies, and implementation strategies for local review;
- Research and guide communities through complex planning issues;
- Expedite implementation and enforcement.



1.6. Work Plans, Public Engagement and Budgets



Burlington; Image Credit: DHCD

Planning takes time, input from many people, and often includes debate. A full update can take a year or more. To make the process worthwhile—and avoid ending up with unused ideas—take time to prepare. “Planning to plan” saves time, money, and resources.

1.6.1. Getting Started

In Vermont, municipal plans expire eight years after adoption. To retain your authority to amend or adopt zoning, your community must adopt a new plan, or update the old one. Start the planning process at least two years before the plan’s expiration date to allow enough time, and secure needed resources.

Begin by reviewing what you already have, including past plans, studies, and the regional plan, and familiarize yourself with the necessary plan requirements. Most communities build off existing work. Use the final chapter of this module, “Working with Existing Plans,” to identify gaps or areas that need attention. Your regional planning commission has likely reviewed your current plan. This involves flagging issues and identifying opportunities to improve the plan. Share this feedback with your planning commission to guide the process.

Next, decide how much work is needed. Will this be a full rewrite or a simple update? With input from the regional planning commission, the local planning commission usually makes this decision.



1.6.2. Work Plans: Outlining the Planning Process

Next, outline the process your community will follow to arrive at a plan. This module outlines a 5-step planning process. However, some communities may do things differently. For example, you may choose to launch an extensive public engagement effort— through public forums, community surveys, newspapers, and other outreach— at the beginning of the process, before collecting the assessment data described in Step 1 of the module. The time needed for each step varies, depending on the methods the community chooses and the time volunteers, staff, or consultants dedicate to the work.





1.6.3. Developing Strategies to Inform and Invite Engagement

Community engagement is the foundation of a strong municipal plan—not just a task to check off. Involving residents also strengthens civic life. However, part-time volunteers often struggle to keep the public informed and gather meaningful input. Set aside time to create a clear and realistic communications strategy that includes the community in the planning process. The planning commission should use a variety of tools to share updates and invite feedback. The following framework will help you choose outreach methods that reach diverse community members. See Step 2 for specific strategies.

1.6.4. Creating a Timeline and Assigning Responsibility

After outlining the process, create a schedule with each step, who's responsible (the full commission, individual members, advisory committee, staff, or consultants), and estimated timelines. Before assigning roles, contact your Regional Planning Commission (RPC) to discuss their available staff support.

1.6.5. Creating a Budget

Set a budget that covers all tasks and materials in your timeline, including mapping, consultants, surveys, workshops (with food and childcare), and graphic design. If staff capacity is limited, address that gap early.

Funding sources could include municipal budgets or grant funds. Vermont's Municipal Planning Grant program was created to support municipal planning efforts. RPCs, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies may also provide additional technical assistance, upon request.

Plan for expenses early to align with the municipal budget cycle and state grant deadlines. If you're applying for a grant, create a backup plan in case the grant is not awarded. When you expect to hire technical help, the planning commission should speak with at least two consultants to get advice on project structure and general cost estimates. When you're ready to hire, prepare a formal request for proposals or qualifications.

An Advisory Committee to Guide the Plan's Development

Creating a Municipal Plan Advisory (or "Steering") Committee made up of diverse members of local boards and commissions as well as other community leaders helps to keep community members informed and engaged throughout the process.

A separate committee can also be helpful if the planning commission has other pressing duties (such as subdivision or site plan review) that draw attention away from their work preparing the plan.

Also, if the community hires an outside consultant, or even an RPC staff member who is likely less familiar with the community, the local knowledge provided by advisory committee members will be essential in crafting municipal plan features like the a future land use map.



1.7. Contents and Format of the Plan

Vermont law requires all municipal plans to include 12 key elements (*see next page*). Missing any of them can put the plan at risk of legal challenge. If a court finds the plan invalid, your town cannot use it in Act 250 or Public Service Board Section 248 proceedings, or as a basis for local zoning.

[Appendix 1](#) provides a checklist of these elements, which also appear throughout the five steps in this module. Their importance may vary depending on your community's needs. Plans can cover other topics beyond the required 12 elements, such as public health or climate change.

While every plan must address all 12 elements, the planning commission chooses how to approach each one. Most towns organize plans by topics like land use, housing, transportation, or natural resources. Others center them around major goals. Review other plans to find the best structure for your community. Keep your plan clear and concise so landowners, developers, volunteers, and local officials—most with limited time—can easily use it as a guide.

Recommendations for creating user-friendly plans include:

- **Focus on achieving the vision of the future, not documenting the past or the present.**

Many plans focus too much on describing current conditions, and not enough on future goals and actions. Use the community assessment in Step 1 to document facts and trends that support informed decisions. To keep the main plan focused on vision and action, place background data in an appendix.

- **Structure your plan around your big ideas.**

Every plan has a few big ideas that are necessary to achieve the community vision. Highlight these ideas clearly, don't bury or scatter them. Most required elements will fit within these important themes, keeping the plan concise.

- **Utilize maps, images, and graphics.**

Information can be much more easily understood by relying on more than just the written word. Well-thought-out graphics can be effective communication tools that have the added benefit of being easily shared through social media. Seek out professionals with graphic communication skills to enhance the plan.

- **Take out unnecessary information or unfeasible ideas.**

Remove unnecessary details and actions that are too costly or politically unlikely to keep the plan clear and credible.



1.7.1. Required Plan Elements

See [Appendix 1](#) for a detailed review of all elements that your municipal plan must address, per state statute (24 VSA 4382). They include:

- A statement of objectives, policies, and programs of the municipality
- A land use plan consisting of a map and statement of present and future land uses
- A transportation plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities
- A utility and facility plan for public and private infrastructure
- A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources
- An educational facilities plan, present and projected uses and the local public school system
- An implementation plan, to actualize the goals and objectives of this municipal plan
- How this plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region
- An energy plan, including energy resources, needs, and how to accommodate future growth
- A housing element, stating how the community will enable the creation of needed housing
- An economic development plan
- A flood resilience plan

Your community decides how to address the required elements. Before adopting the plan, regional planning staff must review your draft to ensure it meets statutory standards and complies with the regional plan. After your town responds to their feedback and makes edits, voting members of the regional planning commission must formally approve the plan for it to have legal standing in local and state permits (see [Regional Approval of the Municipal Plan](#)).



Tinmouth; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Chapter 2. The Five Steps

This module outlines a 5-step method designed to help communities create a municipal plan that meets state planning requirements while focusing on the issues that matter most to them. Most of Vermont's cities and towns have an existing plan that just needs an update rather than a complete overhaul. If your municipality has a plan in place, review the "Working with Existing Plans" section of the module for guidance on how to assess your existing plan then come back to these steps for reference.

Step 1: Conduct a Community Assessment

Step 2: Develop a Shared Community Vision

Step 3: Identify Common Goals and Opportunities

Step 4: Map Out the Future

Step 5: Make it Happen



2.1. Step 1: Conduct a Community Assessment

A community assessment evaluates resources, conditions, and trends in your community, providing the information necessary to identify your assets, needs, challenges, and opportunities. This chapter highlights key considerations for your community to analyze when developing or updating a plan, along with statutory requirements.

Where to get Data?

Starting your planning process with a community assessment helps you determine where you are now and where you are headed. The assessment assists you in making informed decisions throughout the planning process, and keeps your vision grounded in reality.

However, the assessment (unlike the vision and action items) should not be the focus of your plan document.

We recommend keeping the assessment separate from the other parts of the plan as a “Fact Book” in the plan appendix. This way, you can make the plan shorter and more user-friendly and focused on the shared community vision, rather than getting lost in a sea of maps, facts, and figures.

Maps and GIS

Statute requires that plans include a number of maps to display information about your municipality, detailed in the corresponding sections. Almost all maps are now created using Geographic Information Systems software, or “GIS.” GIS lets us see, question, analyze, and interpret large amounts of data to understand relationships, patterns, and trends. The [DHCD Planning Atlas](#) is preloaded with a lot of the planning information you need. You can easily make and analyze your own maps, or request expert assistance from your regional planning commission. The [Vermont Center for Geographic Information \(VCGI\)](#) is another indispensable map-making resource that maintains the state’s largest database of geospatial information.



Northfield; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Don’t be overwhelmed by Step 1. The vast majority of the information you need is readily available, and there are many resources available to help you! Regional planning commission staff can be especially helpful during this step.



2.1.1. What Do We Need to Know About Our Community?



Craftsbury Common; Image Credit: DHCD

Municipal plans can draw from an endless range of information and data. However, too much information can lead to overload and inaction. This section highlights the information required by statute and key considerations for each topic. Based on your community's needs, you may choose to explore some categories in more depth. Focus on data that helps you understand your town's past, present, and future trends and leave out information that doesn't support that purpose.

Assessment involves collecting and presenting data (inventory) and interpreting it through trend analysis and by asking what the data means for the community.

Consider the following topics for assessment:

1. Demographics
2. Economic conditions
3. Natural resources and physical conditions
4. Transportation
5. Utilities facilities and services
6. Energy
7. Historic and cultural resources
8. Housing
9. Flood resilience and hazard mitigation
10. Land use
11. Regional context

Statutory requirements of municipal plans (from 24 V.S.A. §4382) are indicated at the beginning of each topic.



2.1.2. Demographics

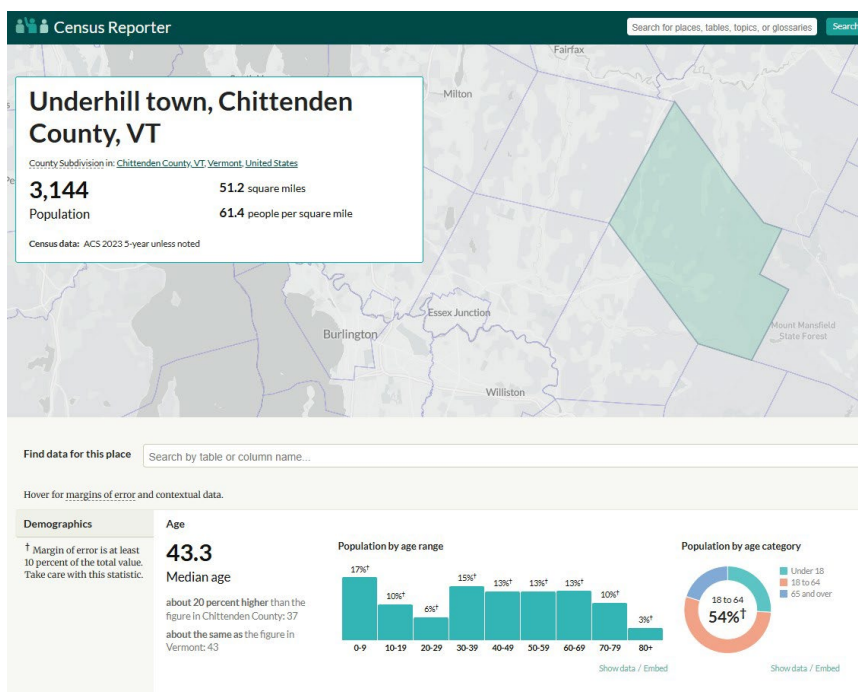
Historic and current data on your community's population and its characteristics help identify trends in the municipality and region. These trends reveal future needs for services, facilities, and economic growth—such as schools, housing, recreation, land use, economic development, transportation, police, fire protection, and utilities. While plans don't explicitly require very detailed demographic data, a strong understanding of your community's demographics is essential to crafting your plan's vision and goals.

Key Considerations

- Population trends: projected population growth
- Population characteristics: gender, age groups, ethnicity
- Income, poverty levels
- Special-needs populations

Identify notable demographic trends in your community that will inform the visioning process (Step 2) and the identification of community goals and measurable objectives (Step 3). As you work through the different assessment sections, gather information on the needs of various populations and highlight instances in which needs are not being met.

Comparing the demographic characteristics and trends in your community with those of your region helps you gain some context for how your community's needs might change in the future.



Demographics Data

The [Census Reporter website](#) is a helpful tool for creating community profiles. It uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau to provide information regarding population, income, housing, families, and more. You can also compare your community's data to state and county numbers as well as neighboring towns.



2.1.3. Economic Conditions

Statutory Requirement: *An economic development element that describes present economic conditions.*

Creating a clear picture of current economic conditions will help identify the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identify policies, projects, and programs necessary to support your goals in Step 3.

The health of your local economy directly impacts the well-being of residents, community facilities and services, and the environment. Planning for ways to support the local economy can help businesses and organizations create jobs aligned with the skills and aims of residents; establish a balanced tax base to meet the needs of the community; protect economic resources; and identify necessary services and products.

Key Considerations

- Employment trends: workforce demographics, employers, job opportunities, wages, unemployment rate
- Place of work: labor-market area, commuting patterns; job center/bedroom community
- Current and past trends in regional and local economic sectors, clusters, employers
- Economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

As you gather and analyze the data, compare it with related topic areas and regional conditions. The analysis should highlight problems, identify opportunities, and reveal needs.

Include an **inventory** of existing economic plans, programs, initiatives, and organizations in your community. These may include:

- Regional economic development strategies
- Local market studies
- Specific infrastructure improvement plans (streetscape, trails, water, and wastewater capacity)
- Workforce development programs
- Business organizations
- Agricultural and forestry initiatives
- Center designations - downtown, village, and planned growth areas as identified in your regional plan (See Module 2 for more information)



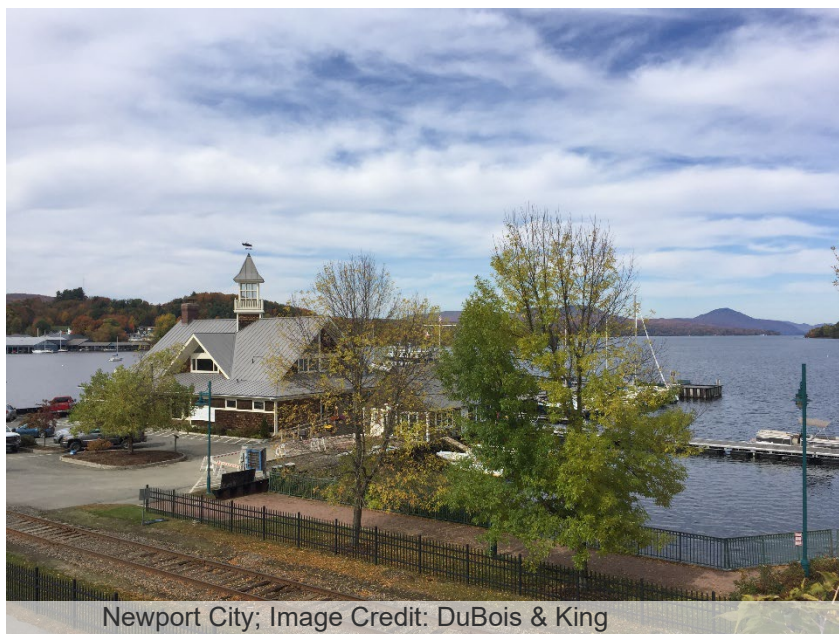
Resources

Vermont has a Statewide [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS) and regional CEDS, which you may want to review as part of your assessment. Additionally, there are 12 Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) throughout Vermont. The RDCs often work closely with the regional planning commissions, and two (Bennington and Northeastern Vermont) are co-housed within the regional planning commission. All provide local technical assistance to develop and strengthen businesses, lead workforce development initiatives, and support employment. You can find your RDC [here](#).

Examples of Using Economic Data

Newport City

[Live, Work, Play](#) is the theme of Newport City's 2022 municipal plan: a plan for creating more housing opportunities to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors; a vision for maintaining a vibrant employment base encompassing multiple sectors; and leveraging access to recreational opportunities, including Lake Memphremagog and nearby ski areas, bike paths, snowmobile trails, and other forms of outdoor recreation. The [Master Plan Update of 2024](#) explores specific issues of economic change to achieve the vision of the municipal plan. The Master Plan Update explores conceptual development scenarios for a series of priority development sites, as well as the housing needs to support a local workforce and an active downtown population, key transportation linkages, and infrastructure needs. In addition to the investigation of sites and the physical context needed to support growth, the Master Plan Update identifies potential funding sources and financing tools to help realize change.



Newport City; Image Credit: DuBois & King





2.1.4. Physical Conditions and Natural Resources

Statutory Requirement: *A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas.*

Documenting your community's natural features and physical conditions that provide important ecological functions and need protection for the public's health, safety, and welfare. It also helps identify opportunities and limits in other parts of your plan, such as land use, housing, and transportation. This assessment supports your community's policy statement on preserving rare and irreplaceable natural areas ([Step 3](#)).

Collect data and maps that cover the key considerations listed below.

Key Considerations

- Topography and drainage: elevations, steep slopes, landforms, development suitability, watersheds, stormwater drainage patterns, high wind locations
- Soils & earth resources: primary agricultural soils, forest soils; mineral deposits; development suitability
- Water resources: surface waters, groundwater, river corridors, wetlands, shore lands
- Wildlife habitat: habitat blocks, core habitat areas, travel corridors, rare/threatened/endangered species habitat, vernal pools
- Climate (prevailing longer-term weather patterns) and climate change; impacts based on climate change (geography, local economy, demographic vulnerability)

Your assessment should inventory any existing open-space plans, programs, initiatives, and organizations in your community. These resources can help shape your goals and actions (Step 3). Mapping current or planned conservation areas and resources helps guide priorities for protecting natural resources.

Track changes in your natural resources over time, such as shifts in water quality or the amount of conserved land, to understand their current health and condition.

Resources

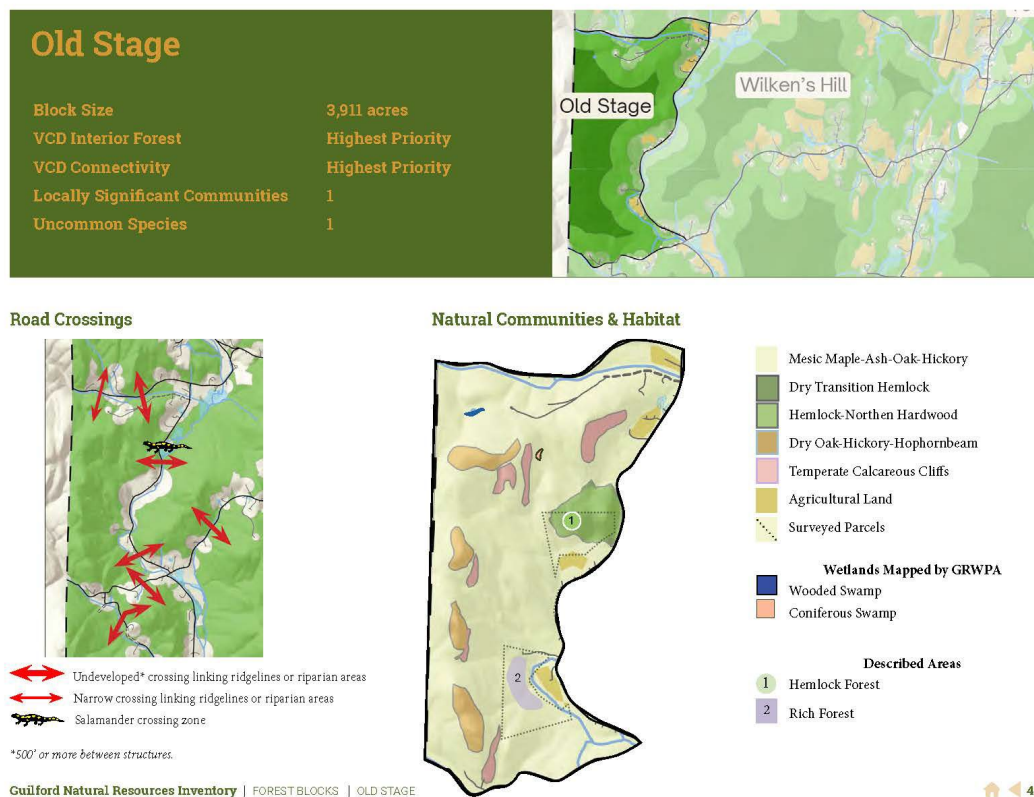
- The VT Agency of Natural Resource's online mapping tool [BioFinder](#) displays identifies key natural resources and locations for conservation and protection. Biofinder can produce tables and reports describing and analyzing resources.
- The [ANR Atlas](#) also provides a variety of information including hazardous waste sites, Act 250 permits, watersheds, wetlands, slopes and more.
- Regional plans and [Basin plans](#) can help you see how your community fits in the bigger picture.



Examples of Using Natural Features Data

Guilford

The Town of Guilford's 2015-2020 Town Plan included specific actions regarding natural resources, including to undertake a comprehensive natural resources inventory. This inventory, [A Survey of Guilford's Geology, Flora, and Fauna](#), completed in 2023, maps and describes the interior forest blocks, connectivity blocks and road crossings, physical landscapes, natural communities, old forests, shrub-forb communities, and uncommon and rare species. These features comprise the highest priorities for maintaining an ecologically functional landscape. The Town recognized that more than 50% of the development over the past 20 years occurred more than 300' from the road, potentially encroaching into sensitive habitat blocks and corridors. The report presents the assets and vulnerabilities of Guilford's natural resources and provides recommendations in the form of Conservation Considerations to guide planning around land use and conservation. The 2022-2030 Town Plan, revised in 2023, takes the inventory and utilizes it to create additional policies and actions to further their vision to *"anticipate change and manage growth in a way that conserves our natural resources and ensures sustainability for future generations."*





2.1.5. Transportation

Statutory Requirement: *A transportation plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads, and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need.*

Transportation infrastructure and concerns vary widely from place to place, from maintenance of rural roads to parking, transit, and streetlights, and encompass both automotive and active transportation uses like walking or biking. Community transportation networks include Main Streets, rural roads, trail networks, and more.

A variety of transportation choices can help keep people connected, help people spend less money on transportation, and be an attraction for locals and visitors alike.

Collect data and maps that cover the key considerations listed below.

Key Considerations:

- Vehicles: ownership, use, vehicle miles traveled, electric vehicle–charging stations, parking
- Highway system/network: legal and functional road classifications, ownership, infrastructure (e.g. culverts, bridges, road surface), maintenance costs, suitability for cyclists
- Traffic volumes and patterns: congestion areas, high accident locations
- Multimodal transportation including sidewalk, multi-use paths, and trail networks: existing networks, use, connections or links to other networks as well as “Complete Streets” policies
- Public transit: facilities, services, service areas
- Rail: available freight and passenger services, facilities; planned improvements
- Airports: available services, facilities, airport zones, planned improvements

Additional Information to Review:

- Existing traffic studies
- Scenic route/byway designations
- Corridor-management plans
- Access-management policies



The Municipal Plan

- Planned improvements

Your plan should identify the primary function of your community's transportation infrastructure based on its surrounding context and evaluate how it's working. This information will guide future transportation and land use policies. For example, an arterial road may focus on moving traffic quickly from place to place, while a downtown street may prioritize slower speeds and tolerate some congestion to support local businesses and improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

Resources:

- VTrans [Effects of Smart Growth Strategies on VMT and GHG Emissions in Vermont](#)
- Vermont Department of Health [Complete Streets: A Guide for Vermont Communities](#) provides an overview of Complete Streets and how they are applied throughout Vermont.
- CCRPC maintains a page of [Transportation Resources](#), including Access Management, Complete Streets, Roundabouts, and more.
- The [Vermont Green Streets Guide](#) takes a complete look at the street, "seeing stormwater as a resource, universal mobility as a priority, and local plants as co-engineers of a complex built environment."

Transportation infrastructure is vital to a community, but is expensive to build and maintain. Understanding these costs helps guide future investment decisions. Tracking life cycle costs, liabilities, and benefits of adding a new municipal road—along with expected tax revenue from development—can inform policies on owning and maintaining transportation infrastructure.

COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, and maintaining roads that considers all users—pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers.

Vermont law requires municipalities to apply Complete Streets principles to all transportation projects and phases they manage—except for those involving unpaved roads. This includes planning, development, construction, and maintenance. This means towns must consider safety and access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or how they travel. (19 V.S.A. § 309d)



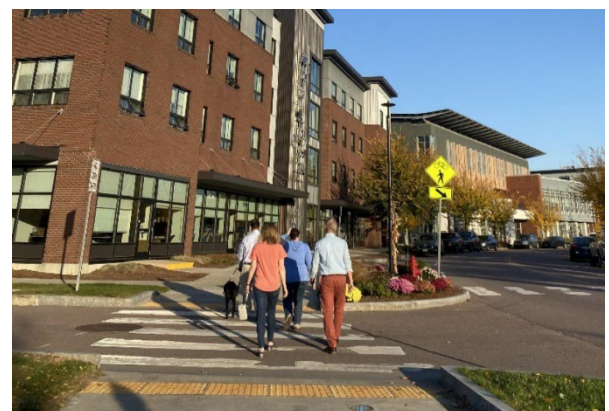
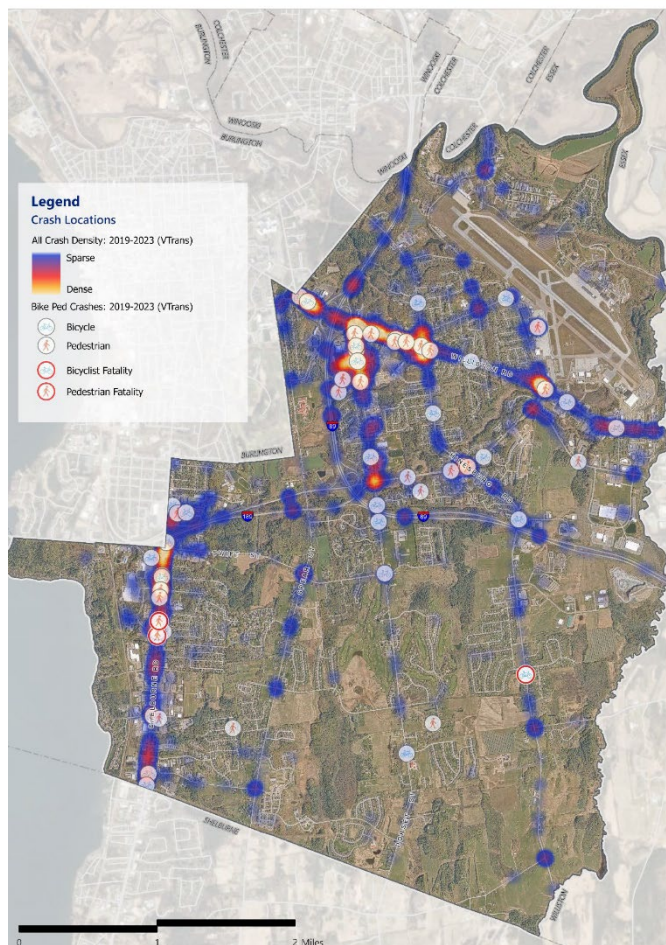
Examples of Using Transportation Data:

South Burlington

The City of South Burlington is building a sustainable, equitable, and accessible future by prioritizing active transportation across its roads, sidewalks, paths, and trails. The City aims to make walking, biking, rolling, transit, and other shared modes safe, convenient, and natural choices for people of all ages and abilities, year-round. By encouraging a shift from vehicle use to active and shared transportation on safe infrastructure, the City supports local and state efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and improve safety and public health.

Using a heat map of pedestrian and bicycle crashes—including fatalities—the City identified high-risk areas across its street network. This data informed the development of the [Active Transportation Plan](#), which guides public investment in safer crosswalks, bike lanes, and signalized intersections. The plan outlines specific projects, policies, and programs to improve safety, connectivity, accessibility, equity, and public transit use.

FIGURE 5 2019–2023 Crash Data



Clockwise from left: Crash locations; Active Transportation Plan logo; Market Street Crosswalk; image credits: VHB



2.1.6. Utilities, Facilities, and Services

Statutory Requirements: *(1) A map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational, and other public sites, buildings, and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities. (2) An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.*

This part of the assessment helps you make the required recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services. Recommendations should prioritize needs, estimate costs, and determine methods of financing.

Community facilities and services are provided by, or available within, the municipality for the benefit of the general public's health, safety, and enjoyment. They include physical spaces such as schools, park and recreation facilities, and libraries, infrastructure such as public water supply, waste disposal systems, and solid waste management, and services including police and fire protection, health and human services, and general administrative services. These facilities and services have a significant impact on the municipality's ability to grow and sustain itself.

Collect data and maps that cover the key considerations listed below. Much of this information may only be available in your municipal office rather than online.

Key Considerations:

- Local government: administration, staffing, tax base
- Public water supplies: facilities, service area, treatment capacity, mapped source protection areas
- Municipal wastewater treatment: facilities, service area, reserve capacity, allocation
- Public safety: fire, rescue, police; facilities, equipment, services; crime rates, calls, response times
- Public works: facilities, equipment, programs
- Municipal recreational: facilities, services, programs
- Public cemeteries: capacity
- Solid waste management: facilities, services
- Telecommunications: available facilities, services; wireless/broadband coverage
- Educational facilities: Current and projected enrollment of pre-K, elementary, secondary, higher education, adult; capacities



The Municipal Plan

- Child care facilities: services, child care programs, capacities
- Health care facilities: services, programs; community health initiatives
- Social services: programs

Evaluate capacity, use, and size to see if resources are under strain and if current and future needs are being met. Both facilities that are too small and overutilized as well as those that are too big and underutilized facilities can put unnecessary pressure on the municipality.

Evaluate these facilities and services in terms of their:

- Quality and level of service delivery
- Capacity to meet current and future needs based on population, economic, and land use trends
- Impact on orderly and efficient municipal and regional development;
- Municipal and regional standards and goals.

Your assessment should inventory any existing planned upgrades, replacements, or mergers, as well as review operating and capital budgets. Document the costs of expanding, maintaining, and replacing facilities and services to guide future decisions about growth or reduction and identify potential opportunities for merging or regionalizing services when applicable. Many of these utilities, facilities, and services are likely engaged in their own strategic plans and the relevant groups or bodies should provide input into the assessment and be involved in the planning process.

Using Utilities, Facilities, and Services Data:

Pawlet

The Village of West Pawlet commissioned a [planning study](#) to address the causes and possible solutions to several known municipal infrastructure challenges, including:

- Increasing cost and a shrinking user base from its town wastewater system
- A confusing and dangerous uncontrolled 5-way intersection in the village center
- The loss of its only local general store through a devastating fire
- Mapping vacant and under-utilized properties in and around the village center
- Lost economic opportunities from not engaging actively with users of a popular rail trail that passes through the village

The study recommended the town seek and direct future investments to meet these opportunities through targeted public investment, state and federal transportation programs, and partnering with housing developers and private investors.



2.1.7. Energy

Statutory Requirement: *An analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the municipality to inform a statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs to implement that policy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy.*

Energy planning brings several benefits to your community, including cost savings, energy independence, a clean environment, and local jobs. Many communities have energy committees that help provide energy-related information. An “enhanced” energy plan is an optional addition to the municipal plan that provides greater municipal control over the siting of renewable energy facilities, implements State goals at a local level, and influences state review processes.

Key Considerations:

- Consumption/energy use: existing, projected by sector (e.g. thermal – space heating and water, transportation, and electrical usage) and corresponding cost
- Utilities and fuel providers: service areas, customer base
- Facilities and infrastructure: generation facilities, transmission corridors, substations, distribution lines, three- phase power
- Renewable energy: type, potential (e.g., mapped solar, wind, hydro)
- Energy efficiency: municipal policies, programs; planned upgrades, improvements
- Development patterns that may affect energy use

Whether or not you intend to create an “enhanced energy plan,” the regional plan can serve as a critical resource. They are a clearing house for multiple data sources, including the Public Service Department, Efficiency Vermont, the utility companies, and the U.S. Census to create energy use estimates and projections. You’ll get most of the information you need from your RPC, with the possible exception of specific municipal facilities. Inventory any existing municipal energy programs, planned facilities/ efficiency improvements, and local energy policies. This should provide a picture of current energy use, future needs, and potential opportunities to meet those needs.

Resources:

- [Energy Planning & Implementation Guidebook for Vermont Communities](#)
- The [Energy Action Network Energy Dashboard \(EAN\)](#) can help establish measurable targets and evaluate the costs and savings associated with various actions related to energy and efficiency needs.



The Municipal Plan

- Regional Planning Commission Municipal-level Data. The regional planning commissions, have all compiled municipal-level data on energy use estimates across all three sectors, as well as localized targets for weatherization and fuel switching that would support statewide energy goals.

Choosing the right tools and analysis helps guide your actions in Step 3 (goals and objectives) and Step 5 (implementation). For example, an analysis may provide data for municipal buildings' energy use and audit results along with the costs and savings of various improvement options. This information helps the community set realistic energy-saving targets and choose the most effective actions to achieve them.

While municipalities are prohibited from regulating electric transmission or generation facilities [see Appendix 2], mapping out the best locations for renewable energy facilities can help guide energy development to appropriate areas of your town – especially if you have chosen to adopt an enhanced energy plan. Instructions and resources for assessing the potential for renewable energy siting and integrating that with land use considerations are available from the Public Service Department and from your RPC.



Using Energy Data:

Woodbury

As part of its [2023 Town Plan](#) update, the Town of Woodbury—a rural community of 928 in Washington County—developed an Enhanced Energy Plan to align with Vermont’s renewable energy goals. The plan projects that Woodbury must double its renewable energy generation over the next 25 years. It also calls for replacing all private gas-powered vehicles with up to 1,200 electric or biodiesel vehicles and converting 212 fossil fuel heating systems—half of all households—to cold-climate heat pumps or other renewable technologies. If achieved, these targets would position Woodbury as a statewide leader in reducing emissions from Vermont’s two largest sources: transportation and heating.

Table 6 Targets for Renewable Energy Use			
Year	2025	2035	2050
Renewable Energy Use - Transportation	9.6%	31.3%	90.2%
Renewable Energy Use - Heating	51.0%	65.9%	93.1%

This data displays targets for the percentage of transportation and heating energy use coming from renewable sources during each target year. This data was developed using the LEAP analysis.

Table 7 Targets for Renewable Energy Generation			
Year	2025	2035	2050
Total Renewable Generation Target (in MWh)	1,457	2,332	5,831

Renewable generation targets for municipalities were developed by the regional planning commission.

Woodbury’s Energy Plan outlines targeted strategies to meet local energy goals, including mapping areas best suited for new solar and wind generation. The plan also connects residents with resources to support vehicle fuel-switching and home heating conversions, such as state and federal tax credits, Efficiency Vermont rebates, and energy-efficient building standards incorporated into the town’s zoning bylaw.

2.1.8. Significant Cultural, Historic and Scenic Resources

Statutory Requirement: *A statement of policies on the preservation of scenic and historic features and resources.*

Vermont’s scenic landscapes, historic buildings, and cultural traditions contribute to a sense of place for residents and visitors. Identifying and highlighting the key features of community character will guide historic and scenic preservation goals and actions. Document both visible resources as well as archeological evidence of historic and prehistoric peoples and culture.



The Municipal Plan

Collect data and maps that cover the key considerations listed below.

Key Considerations:

- Historic sites, structures, districts, cultural landscapes
- Archeological resources
- Scenic viewsheds, ridgelines, road corridors; designated scenic byways
- Places that have special meaning to the community

Inventory existing plans, programs, and initiatives that protect scenic resources, and note which ones have preservation measures or remain vulnerable. Identifying at-risk areas can inform community goals and highlight places of shared meaning and emotional connection. An assessment can map scenic open fields, hillsides, and ridgelines visible from public areas and reveal gaps in protective standards. A community may then set objectives to avoid adverse impacts and adopt an overlay with site design standards for development in these areas.

Resources:

- Regional plans
- Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VT DHP) [State Preservation Plan](#) (updated every five years)
- VT DHP website for [Identifying Historic Resources](#), an online resource center of data about historic resources and historic preservation resources since the 1960s.
- The [Certified Local Government](#) (CLG) program provides funding to assist local governments in integrating historic preservation into their planning processes. Any municipality that has enacted a historic preservation ordinance, enforces that ordinance through a local preservation commission, and meets the minimum requirements is eligible to become a CLG and receive the benefits of the program.



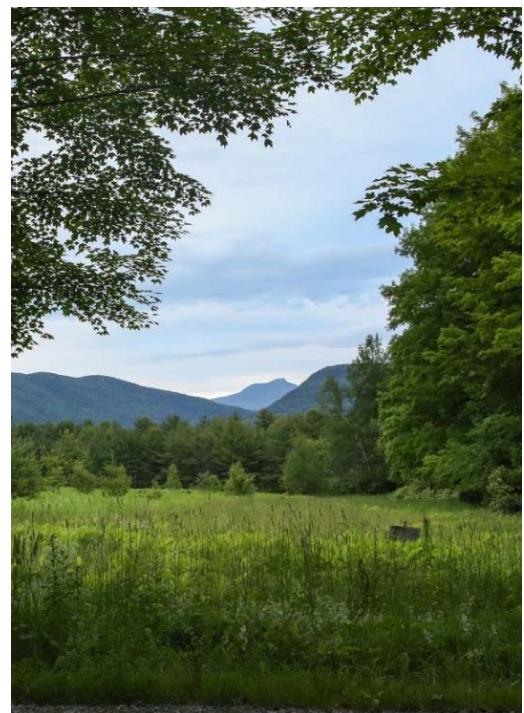
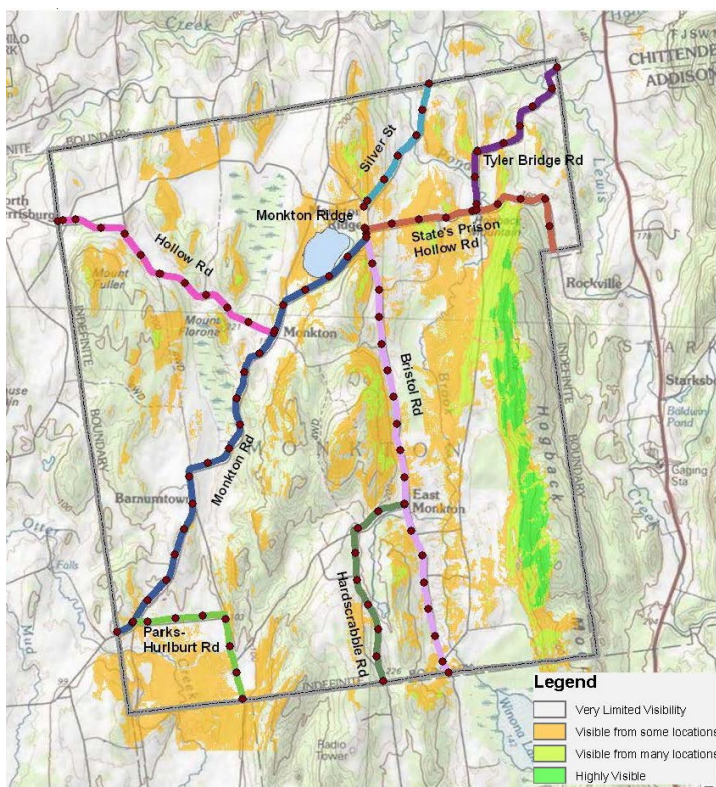
Examples of Utilizing Cultural, Historic, and Scenic Resources Data:

Monkton

As part of a key goal in the Monkton Town Plan, the town undertook a [Scenic Viewshed Study](#) to identify and inventory scenic roads and features across Monkton. The Monkton Planning Commission worked with the Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) to carry out the study, which aimed to understand what makes a view "scenic" and how these places contribute to the town's rural character and identity.

The study combined technical GIS mapping and on-the-ground fieldwork to document natural, cultural, and historic features visible from public roads and lands. It identified prominent elements such as ridge lines, farmland, historic sites, and mountain views that residents consider important to Monkton's character. A project committee helped gather photographs and local knowledge to support the findings and presented them at a community open house to gather additional feedback.

While the study does not propose specific zoning changes, it offers a valuable planning tool. The information collected will help guide future development decisions, land conservation, and town policy, ensuring Monkton retains the scenic qualities that residents value.



From left: Monkton viewshed map, view towards Camel's Hump; Image Credit: ACRPC



2.1.9. Housing

Statutory Requirement: *A housing element that shall include a recommended program for addressing low- and moderate- income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission [in the regional plan]. The program should account for permitted accessory dwelling units, as defined in subdivision 4412(1)(E) of this title, which provide affordable housing.*

Changes to statute as per Act 181: *a recommended program for public and private actions to address housing needs and targets as identified by the regional planning commission pursuant to subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title. The program shall use data on year-round and seasonal dwellings and include specific actions to address the housing needs of persons with low income and persons with moderate income and account for permitted residential development as described in section 4412 of this title.*

A robust housing plan supports the development of diverse, high-quality, and affordable housing that boosts community health and draws in residents and businesses. Understanding current housing stock and future housing needs will guide future goals and actions.

Review the housing needs and targets identified for your community in the regional plan. In some instances, the regional plan data may suffice for your housing assessment, although the Vermont Housing Finance Agency's Vermont Housing Data website provides insightful analysis as well.

Collect and analyze housing data for the following key considerations.

Key Considerations:

- Households: changes in number, average size, homeowner age
- Housing trends: numbers, market conditions, vacancy rates
- Housing stock: type, age, condition
- Housing affordability: median sale prices, rental rates in relation to household income
- Housing needs: regional, local/fair share (e.g. affordable, workforce, special needs, temporary/emergency shelter)
- Housing locations: location in relation to services, facilities; transportation costs of living in different areas

Analyze projected population changes, current housing supply and availability, local jobs, and resident income to understand your housing needs and set development priorities.



The Municipal Plan

Review the types of housing available in your municipality and the region, including whether people have access to both rental units and homes for sale in a range of sizes.

Use median home prices and rents—not averages—since medians give a clearer picture and are less affected by very high or low prices. Check vacancy rates to see if enough housing is available. Low vacancy often means a shortage, which can make it hard to attract new residents and workers. Review the supply of subsidized housing for lower-wage workers and note whether waitlists are long. Inventory any existing housing plans, programs, and organizations in your community and build upon these initiatives.

Resources:

- The [Vermont Housing Data website](#) and the [Vermont Housing Needs Assessment](#) provides useful local data. These resources make it easy to build a housing data profile for your community that include local, county, and statewide trends. The [assessment guide](#) is a tool specifically designed to help communities include what they need in their local plans.
- The [Vermont Housing Finance Agency](#) published a [report](#), as required by the HOME Act of 2023 and Act 181 of 2024. The report examines in new and greater detail the depths of Vermont’s housing shortage and developed a methodology for creating regional targets for 2030 and 2050.

Using Housing Data:

Dorset

In 2023, the Town of Dorset’s Housing Task Force commissioned [a study](#) to assess the town’s housing stock—its age, size, types, condition, and cost—alongside household sizes and housing needs. Key findings include:

- Homes built before 1940 make up 30% of Dorset’s housing, and 60% have three or more bedrooms.
- Despite the abundance of large homes, 75% of households consist of just one or two people, creating a mismatch between housing supply and demand.
- The town faces a shortage of rental units and senior housing, while its median home sale price is nearly double the Bennington County average.
- Short-term rentals account for 6.2% of Dorset’s housing—90 units—surpassing the number of new homes built in the past 20 years.
- Over 40% of renter households are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

These findings have informed Dorset’s proposed zoning reforms and updates to its municipal plan to support more diverse and affordable housing options.



2.1.10. Flood Resilience and Hazard Mitigation

Statutory Requirement: *A flood resilience plan that identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designates those areas to be protected, including flood plains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; A flood resilience plan may reference an existing local hazard mitigation plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6.*

Use the latest maps of flood and fluvial erosion hazard areas and river corridors to set goals and objectives, recommend policies, and choose strategies that protect these areas. This also helps reduce risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

Key Considerations:

- Mapped river corridors and special flood hazard areas
- Other mapped natural hazard areas
- Properties and infrastructure vulnerable to flood damage or other natural hazards, including bridges and culverts
- Wetlands, flood plains, farm and forest land that provide or could provide capacity for slowing and storing floodwaters

Vermont's long-term economic development strategy supports reinvestment and growth in and around Vermont's historic centers – many of which are near rivers or lakes, thus vulnerable to damage from floods. Land development patterns may help or hinder a community's ability to avoid and respond to disasters. However, in most Vermont communities, it's not practical or possible to relocate existing buildings, roads, and other infrastructure to locations outside of river corridors. Competing and conflicting interests can make it difficult to improve public safety and reduce flood damage.

Resources:

- The State of Vermont [Flood Ready](#) website provides a wealth of data on flood resilience, flood risk assessment, flood recovery resources, and more.
 - [Community Risk Assessments](#) instantly provide flood risk data for your municipality, including buildings in flood hazard areas, past mitigation actions and timelines, and the status of Local Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Operations Plans. Use this information to assess community preparedness and identify opportunities to reduce flood damage.
 - [Flood Resilience Checklist](#) assesses how well your community is positioned to avoid or reduce flood damage, reduce insurance rates and to



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protect people and property. This tool assists with developing a strategy of policies, programs and investments to:

- Protect people, property, and infrastructure
- Strengthen preparedness at individual, community, and regional levels
- Coordinate a fast and efficient disaster response
- Minimize recovery costs and support post-flood economic stability
- [Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative](#) (VERI) created a methodology to help communities engage and involve citizens in the process to identify policy changes and projects to minimize the economic impact of future floods. The report details a step-by-step process to combine inundation and fluvial erosion flood maps with data on critical infrastructure and key economic assets to prioritize steps that will reduce local risks.
- The [Vermont Transportation Resilience Planning Tool](#) (TRPT) identifies infrastructure that are vulnerable to damage from floods, estimates risk based on vulnerability, and identifies potential mitigation measures.
- The [Municipal Vulnerability Indicators Tool](#) (MVI) helps Vermont towns assess climate change risks across social, economic, and environmental factors. It shows how climate impacts transportation, energy, housing, emergency services, and more. Towns can use it to support hazard mitigation, energy planning, and other climate efforts. The tool includes climate hazard maps and community data that highlight potential vulnerabilities.

Using Flood Resilience and Hazard Mitigation Data:

Lyndonville

A strong municipal plan can drive purposeful, long-term action. The flood resilience element of [Envision Lyndon](#) provides basin-level context, recognizing the town's vulnerable position on a flat valley floor below the confluence of major Passumpsic River tributaries—a location that has led to severe and damaging floods.

The plan outlines clear goals, policies, and actions to restore floodplains and reduce upland flooding. Its adoption, along with updates to the local hazard mitigation plan, allowed the Town to advance long-identified flood mitigation projects using modern tools like LIDAR drone photography and 2D modeling.

As a result, Lyndon identified two key projects: restoring floodplain function at the former town garage site and replacing a dry culvert on Route 5 with a dry bridge. These efforts aim to lower flood levels and prevent debris from blocking downstream infrastructure.



2.1.11. Land Use

Statutory Requirement: *A land use plan consisting of a map and statement of present land uses, including information on the amount, intensity, and character of such land uses.*

Document current land use in your community to show development patterns and guide future land use decisions. Analyzing past and present land use, along with local and state regulations, helps predict where future growth may happen. This information supports municipal planning goals and actions.

Choose the land use types you want to show, using information from Step 4 (Map Out the Future), USGS land cover data, or other reliable sources. If available, use digital parcel data linked to the grand list. This helps show land ownership, large parcels, and subdivisions. You can also color-code land uses and run statistics in GIS software. Aerial photos and building permit records are useful for indicating recent development.

Key Considerations:

- Historic/existing settlement patterns
- Changes in land use/land cover
- Subdivision and development trends: parcel numbers, size, rate, type, location
- Existing/proposed “Center” and “Neighborhood” Community Investment designations.
- Design considerations: design review districts, historic districts
- Regional trends: planned pattern of development and existing zoning

Use GIS software to analyze current land use and gather data, such as the percentage of area by type of land use, neighborhood density, and age of housing (depending on the information available in your grand list). Use this data along with changes in development and land use to conduct various build-out scenarios.

Build-Out Scenarios:

A build-out scenario uses past development patterns to predict likely future growth and development. You can project multiple scenarios for what your community might look like in 20 years using population projections, housing data, economic trends, natural resources, and local regulations. Many of these scenarios explore different outcomes based on various assumptions. Mapping the current projection based on today’s trends helps start the process of creating a shared community vision (Step 2).

If nothing changes, and recent trends continue, this projection shows what the community may look like in the future and can prompt questions such as:

- Is this what we want our community to look like?



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- How would we like it to be different?
- What do we need to change so that the future of our community looks more like our vision than the projection of current trends?

Resources:

There are a variety of methodologies and tools available to you to help conduct build-out scenarios, which can be developed with varying degrees of detail and resources.

- [Envision Tomorrow](#) can model the fiscal impacts of various build-out scenarios.
- Regional Planning Commission (RPC) staff have created build-out scenarios and analyses for several communities in Vermont. Your RPC can help advise you on what method might be the best fit.
- Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission [ECOS Plan](#)

Using Land Use Data:

Charlotte

Charlotte's town plan includes a [future land use map](#) intended to guide long-term development through existing zoning. However, planners found a disconnect between the goal of encouraging infill in historic village centers and a 5-acre minimum lot size requirement—despite average lots being under 1 acre. To address this, the town commissioned a study of recent development patterns as part of a [broader effort](#) to explore strategies for supporting appropriate village growth.

Regional planning commission staff analyzed the location of actual housing built in town since 1990 that starkly illustrated the disparity between the town's stated 'smart growth' policy, and its actual patterns of development, summarized below:

Homes built in Charlotte, 1990-2022

Decade/Years	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2019	2020-2022	TOTAL 1990-2022
Village Planning Area	14 (6.7%)	9 (7.9%)	5 (4.6%)	1 (4.3%)	29 dwellings (6.4%)
Rural Planning Area	192 (93.3%)	105 (92.1%)	104 (95.4%)	22 (95.7%)	423 dwellings (93.6%)
Total	206	114	109	23	452 total dwellings

A "[heat map](#)" summarizing decades of dispersed development highlighted the gap between the town's growth policies and the outcomes produced by its zoning bylaws. This visual data prompted a re-evaluation of the town's zoning regulations.



2.1.12. Regional Context

Statutory Requirement: *A statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities.*

Review the plans and bylaws of neighboring towns, along with your regional plan and recent development activity, to understand how future changes might affect your community and plans. To receive regional approval, your plan must align with the regional plan and be compatible with approved plans from other municipalities in the region.

Key Considerations:

- Land uses along town boundaries
- Major regional initiatives/projects
- Development trends

You've likely included regional trends in parts of your assessment, such as housing and natural resources. Now, step back and view the regional context from a broader perspective. Ask yourself: Are there important regional factors we might be missing?

Reach out to [Regional Planning Commission](#) staff or your community's RPC representative. They can help you find the most relevant data and information. Contacting officials or planning commissions from neighboring towns is also useful to learn about their plans and expected changes. Some towns may lack updated plans, so talking directly with local officials might be the only way to get the information you need.

Use this part of your assessment to identify possible opportunities for regional cooperation. Across the state, towns have teamed up on projects involving affordable housing, economic development, public safety, highway maintenance, recreation, and conservation.

Examples of Using Regional Plan Data:

Windham Regional Commission

Regional Plans offer background and analysis on growth, development, and planning trends affecting the broader area in which municipalities operate. Towns can use this information to understand how local issues align with or differ from regional patterns and address them effectively in their municipal plans. The [Windham Regional Commission](#) collects detailed demographic, housing, and economic data for each of its 27 towns and aggregates it to highlight regional trends. It can share municipal and neighboring community data to support local planning. Both Regional and municipal plans must align with the State Planning Goals in 24 V.S.A. § 4302, and towns can draw on the Regional Plan for ideas when shaping local objectives and policies.



2.1.13. How Do We Use This Assessment Information?

After gathering and analyzing the information from each section, organize it into a clear format that the public and community members can easily access. Sharing this information early helps people provide informed feedback during the visioning and planning process.

Consider these ways to share your assessment:

- Convert the information into a digital format and post it on your town website. Share the link on platforms like Front Porch Forum, Facebook, and municipal committee email lists, and encourage others to share it.
- Provide paper copies at the library and town offices for easy access.
- Talk to teachers in your community and see if the assessment might fit into their classes.
- Write an article for your local newspaper outlining the process, sharing key findings, providing a link for more details, and inviting community participation.
- Prepare a brief presentation with key findings to start visioning meetings, since not everyone will read the full assessment.



Charlotte; Image Credit: DHCD

Remember, the goal of the assessment is to help your community make informed decisions throughout the planning process and keep your vision realistic.



Bennington; Image Credit: Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC)

2.2. Step 2: Develop a Shared Community Vision

Public participation is critical when developing your community's vision for the future. While visioning might seem “fluffy” or optional, it plays a key role in every municipal plan. Successful plans grow from a shared vision shaped by a strong public process. To create this vision, you must listen carefully and appreciate what people value and want to change. Inviting the community to imagine possibilities helps identify key issues, build agreement, and guide priorities and actions.

Creating a Community Vision doesn't mean everyone will agree—that's unrealistic even in the most inclusive planning processes. However, through discussions, public surveys, events, and workshops, the community can find common ground on priorities. This helps direct funding and bylaw changes informed by the Municipal Plan drafting.

Developing a community vision also builds civic health by encouraging open, respectful conversations—even or especially when opinions differ. Communities that maintain this spirit of collaboration benefit beyond the Municipal Plan, improving bylaw updates, spending priorities, volunteering, and working together in times of need.



2.2.1. Identify what to Maintain, Evolve, and Transform

Although it may seem counterintuitive, the best way to lead people toward the future is to discuss familiar and appreciated places in town as they exist today. When people talk about places that matter to them, they often set aside differences and focus on shared goals. However, simply stating shared goals does not fully support land use visioning because it doesn't connect directly to the places the community values or wants to improve.

Mapping places the community wants to **(1) maintain, (2) evolve, and (3) transform** engages everyone in the process and supports the Municipal Plan, particularly the Future Land Use Map. This approach shows how much change the community wants and highlights areas needing more discussion, planning, or investment. It also guides decisions on state-designated areas and bylaws, as explained in Modules 2 and 3 of this Planning Manual.

Maintain: Municipalities often identify the working landscape and important natural features as areas to maintain and limit change. You may also want to maintain existing neighborhoods, with the addition of some new, well-designed housing opportunities that fit the existing character.

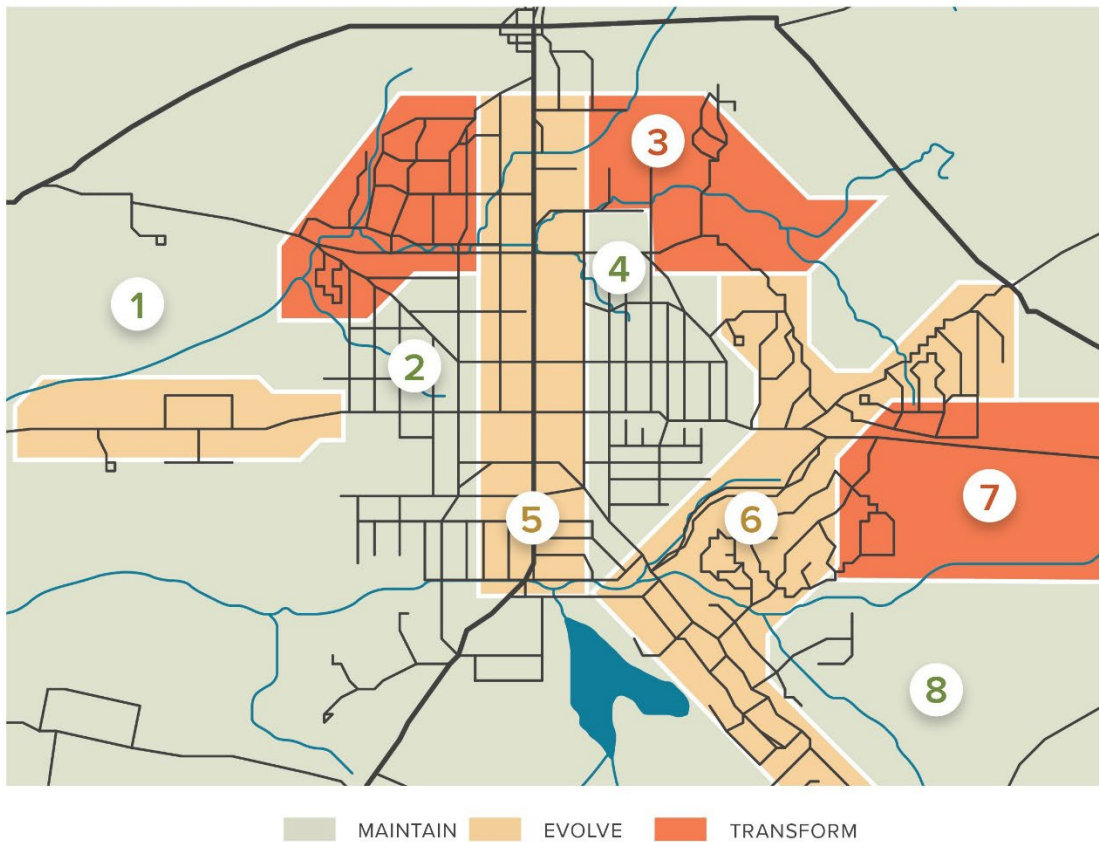
Evolve: There may be great potential in a village center or downtown with opportunities to build on its strength and character. Or you may need for commercial and industrial space to support projected growth. Evolving a place might mean promoting changes that are incremental such as infill development, redevelopment, and streetscape improvements.

Transform: There may be areas of town appropriate for complete transformation; e.g., a strip development, an underutilized parcel, or a contaminated site. Undeveloped areas within walking distance of a community center may also be suitable for transformation into a new neighborhood.

Areas selected to evolve or transform may need more specific planning. Identify priority areas for change and address them in Step 5. Deciding which areas to maintain, evolve, or transform also helps when creating the Future Land Use Map later in the process. This framework also works well for townwide goals that aren't tied to specific locations. For example, your community might want to evolve by becoming more affordable or by supporting more diverse households across town. Keep a "maintain, evolve, transform" list that applies to townwide changes that can't easily be mapped.



Example Concept Map: Maintain, Evolve, Transform



1: Maintain

Protect rural character and opportunities for agricultural enterprises.

2: Maintain

Preserve historic character of neighborhood while allowing for some more housing.

3: Transform

Cleanup and engage downtown waterfront.

4: Maintain

Keep up maintenance on this cherished park!

5: Evolve

Encourage second story housing and make improvements to Main Street.

6: Evolve

Promote infill housing and add bicycle lanes and sidewalks connecting to downtown.

7: Transform

Cleanup brownfield and establish new industrial park.

8: Maintain

Preserve river corridor and mitigate downstream flooding.



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Gathering information and ideas from those in your community about how and where they want to evolve, transform, and maintain can be done in a variety of ways, such as through focus groups, open houses, workshops, or using online tools.

When Gathering People at a Meeting or Event:

1. **Review your meeting materials/instructions** that clearly say who should attend, when and where the meeting will be held, what the planning process aims to do, why their involvement is desired, and how their participation will influence the final outcome.
2. **Review and finalize your communication plan** to get the word out to the community, recognizing that different people receive information differently, so that it is important to use a variety of outreach and engagement strategies.
3. **Distribute your meeting materials** a week or two before the meeting to give people time to think.
4. At the meeting, give a **brief presentation** of the overall work plan and timeline.
5. **Describe the goal** of creating the shared vision and review the instructions on how to participate in the meeting, recognizing that there are many ways to participate, including just listening.
6. **Break up into smaller groups** to encourage back-and-forth discussion or hands-on activities.
7. Provide people with **large maps and materials** such as stickers, sticky notes and markers, to put their ideas on paper.
8. Offer an anonymous **suggestion box**.
9. **Bring the groups back together** to share results.

Many communities find broad agreement on the overall vision, even if people don't agree on every detail. Focus on common ground to manage differing views. Hold neighborhood meetings to address local goals and concerns. For controversial topics, consider using a task force or setting them aside temporarily to keep momentum.

TIPS TO SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC MEETINGS

- Explain the ground rules to keep the conversation focused on achieving the objectives
- Encourage collaboration
- Monitor group progress and keep the meeting on schedule
- Focus on the needs of the participants, and steer them away from personal positions and feelings about topics and/or others in the group
- Give everyone a chance to speak
- Identify themes and areas of agreement and disagreement
- Record the group's discussion, either by notes or audio/video, as may be appropriate to make people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts (some may be reluctant to speak if being recorded)
- Share meeting notes as follow-up, and ask the group to review for accuracy

See [Holding Effective Public Meetings](#) for more tips.



2.2.2. Use Photographs and Images to Explore Ideas



A picture is worth a thousand words. There's no better way to explore options for the future and communicate a final vision than with photographs and images. One way to use images in your visioning process is to invite the community to submit photos showing what they like and value as well as changes they would like to see. Local examples regarding desired changes are preferable – either in Vermont or greater New England.

Local artists, architects, and designers who are willing to help can illustrate the types of possible changes. Local volunteers who know how to use software applications that alter photos, like Photoshop, or show 3D models, like SketchUp, may be able to capture the desired changes in a way that everyone can easily understand. Be sensitive to the time and commitment of these individuals and consider budgeting for suitable compensation as well as public recognition.

Whether at an open house, street fair table, or online survey, photos and images are useful for conducting a “visual preference survey” for everything from building styles to play equipment to landscape design options. People can be shown two or three options per category, and register their choice with stickers, check marks, a show of hands, or survey ranking.

When you use photos or images to spark discussion or support decisions, clearly explain what you're showing and why. For example, a photo of a building with on-street parking might lead someone to focus on the parking rather than the building itself. Or someone might see an image or illustration and assume it's a final design proposal for the town. To avoid confusion, add clear titles, captions, and an upfront explanation of the purpose and how people should give input. This helps keep the focus on what matters and ensures the information supports better outcomes.



2.2.3. Principles of Inclusive Public Engagement

Creating opportunities for engagement requires thoughtful and creative processes for communication and accommodation, particularly focusing on individuals who may have felt unwelcome during prior outreach efforts or in public participation processes.

As noted in [Guiding Principles for a Just Transition](#), many people have multiple connections to "frontline" population groups, including People of Color, Indigenous individuals, rural residents, low-income individuals, seniors, small business owners, single parents, individuals with disabilities, farmers, renters, and those displaced. While it is vital to understand historical and current realities regarding the marginalization of these groups, and prioritize outreach language and strategies accordingly, it is likewise important to listen to, honor, and integrate the unique knowledge, perspectives, values, and experiences of every community member as an individual.

Opportunities for meaningful participation should extend beyond decision-making to administration and oversight as well. People should see themselves in the process and in the outcomes.

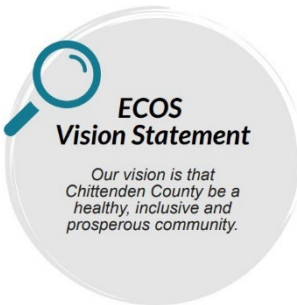
Community conversations and their products must be communicated by community planning leaders in clear and simple language, with clearly defined goals. This involves considering the needs of people with limited English skills, those living with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairments, and individuals with limited or no access to technology.

The benefits and burdens of policy outcomes should be shared by everyone, recognizing that our decisions have impacts beyond the borders of our town and state.

Environmental justice includes meaningful participation throughout the decision-making process, recognizing that different people seek, and express, what is meaningful in different ways. The intentional combination of these differences offers amplified meaning to planning outcomes and to the community.



2.2.4. Create a Vision Statement



A single overarching vision statement is not required of a community. However, creating a shared statement—whether it's called Guiding Principles, a Mission Statement, or a set of objectives—helps capture what residents value, how they see the community's future, and the principles they want to guide that future. Terms like “rural character” can describe many aspects of a community and should clearly articulate their meanings.

Vision statements are usually broader and more general than goals and objectives, which are discussed in Step 3. Below are several examples of community vision statements. They vary in length and detail, but all aim to paint a picture of the community's potential.

Type 1: Short and Sweet

Richmond

“The Town of Richmond aims to be the most livable small town in Vermont. We value our unique combination of authentic Vermont character, diverse local services, and accessible location in Chittenden County. We want Richmond to be an affordable and appealing place for people to live, work, play, shop, and connect. We will take a forward-thinking approach to emerging opportunities and challenges while honoring and strengthening our close-knit community and rural character.”



Calais

“We will foster a community that thrives through continuous development and enhancement while safeguarding our rural essence—preserving our agricultural lands, core forests, wildlife habitats, and natural resources for the well-being of current and future generations.”



Type 2: Comprehensive List

Rupert

Rupert has been and, through the foreseeable future, should remain a rural Vermont town that (*abridged*):

- Retains a working landscape of farm and forest land.
- Provides for the basic needs of our residents – for housing, education, employment, recreation and access to goods and services.
- Promotes energy conservation and the development and sustainable use of renewable energy resources.
- Allows for compatible growth and development, in physically suitable locations that are consistent with traditional settlement patterns, and are served by existing or planned roads, infrastructure, utilities, facilities, and services.
- Strives for efficient and cost-effective local government.
- Ensures that the rate of growth and development does not exceed the town's ability to provide facilities and services, nor overly burden local taxpayers.



Our Vision for Rupert

Rupert has been and, through the foreseeable future, should remain a rural Vermont town that:

- ☞ Cares for the health, safety, and welfare of all of our residents.
- ☞ Celebrates small town life.
- ☞ Cherishes and strives for a strong sense of community.
- ☞ Respects our past while planning for our future.
- ☞ Preserves our rural character of small hamlets surrounded by open countryside.
- ☞ Achieves the best possible quality of environment for present and future generations.
- ☞ Protects the town's important natural, cultural, and scenic resources from incompatible development.
- ☞ Retains a working landscape of farm and forest land.
- ☞ Provides for the basic needs of our residents – for housing, education, employment, recreation and access to goods and services.
- ☞ Promotes energy conservation and the development and sustainable use of renewable energy resources.
- ☞ Allows for compatible growth and development, in physically suitable locations that are consistent with traditional settlement patterns, and are served by existing or planned roads, infrastructure, utilities, facilities and services.
- ☞ Strives for efficient and cost effective local government.
- ☞ Ensures that the rate of growth and development does not exceed the town's ability to provide facilities and services, nor overly burden local taxpayers.

Alburgh

The Alburgh Planning Commission developed the following vision based on the town survey and their conversations with friends and neighbors. (*abridged*)

- A town that encourages local residents to stay and tourists to visit again and again;
- A town that provides natural resource activities and cultural events at night;
- A town that maintains roads, sidewalks, paths and trails for the health and wellness of residents and visitors.
- A town known for the high quality of its fire and rescue personnel and emergency facilities;
- A town that provides its children with a high quality care and education and its adults with the opportunity for life-long learning and advancement.



Type 3: Live, Work, Play

Newport

This Municipal Plan intends to help guide Newport's future growth and potential for the betterment of its residents while honoring and adapting the City's rich history. Newport's exceptional environment and diverse opportunities provide the pillars upon which residents and visitors can live, work, and play.

A Place to Live

The city knows that providing both long-term and short-term housing opportunities is critical. Newport's focus is on maintaining current residential areas, preserving historic character, creating a framework for the development of new and renovated housing, and promoting housing and accommodations that meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors alike. Although the City has a limited land base, it can support future business, residential, and recreational needs in well-suited redevelopment or infill development areas. Growth can and should be respectful of the environment and encourage greater interconnection between neighborhoods and the downtown area.

A Place to Work

The City's advantages include a diverse employment base encompassing manufacturing, retail, banking, professional services, healthcare, and regional state offices. Newport wants to preserve its historic status as the business and employment hub of Orleans County.

A Place to Play

The city's proximity to Canada affords opportunities for cross-border business and tourism. The city is well-positioned for access to recreational opportunities due to its location on Lake Memphremagog and its proximity to ski areas, bike paths, snowmobile trails, and other forms of outdoor recreation. The City should continue to take advantage of these assets to benefit both visitors and residents to enhance the quality of life in the community. The City should continue to build upon the work that has been done to date to improve waterfront access and pedestrian access to the city's downtown and in-town recreation resources.

This Vision for Newport rests on these three pillars, expressed in this Municipal Plan, by exploring foundational elements, establishing clear objectives, and definable actions.



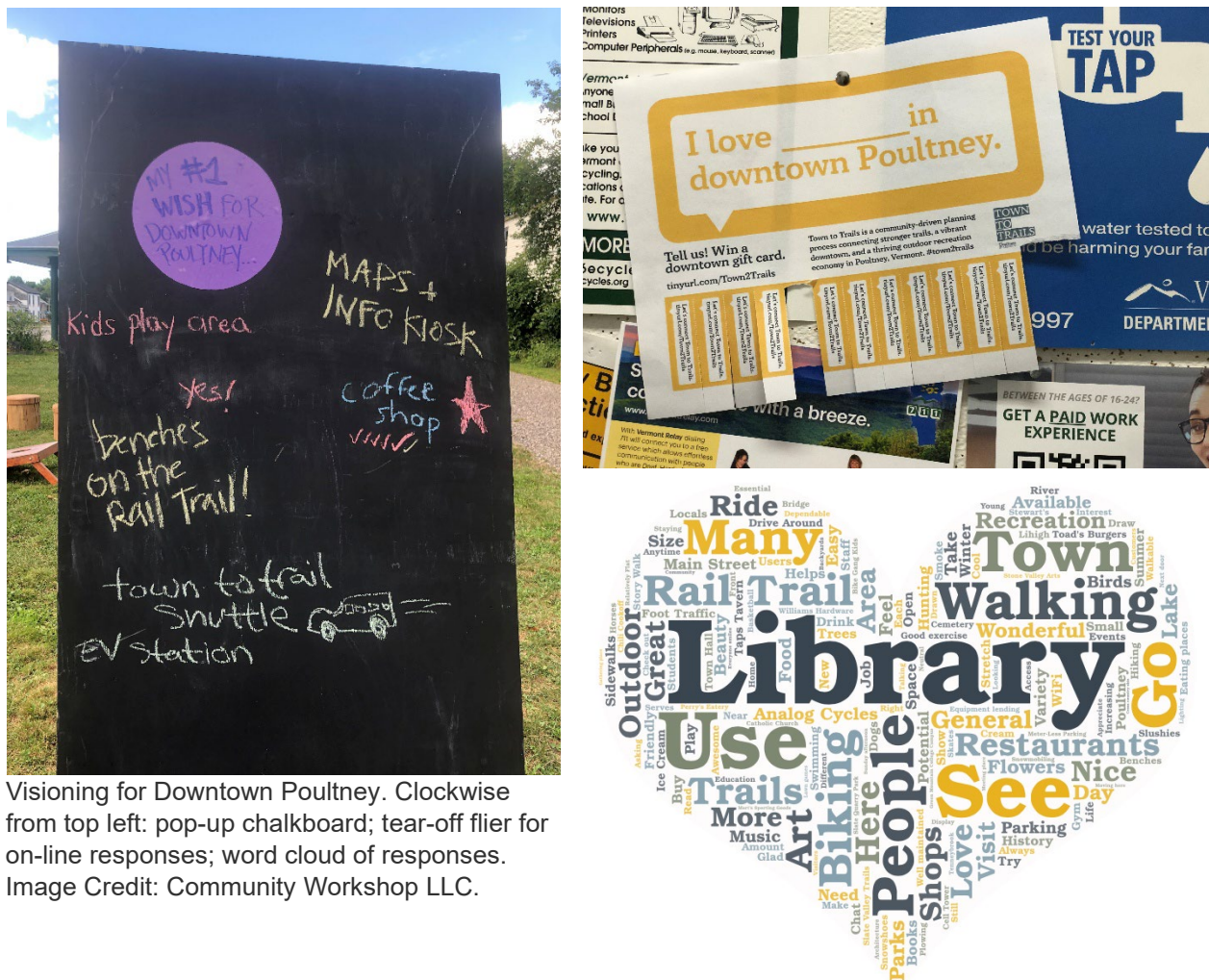


What is the Best Way for My Community to Create a Vision?

The visioning process should begin with a fact-based understanding of the existing conditions of the community, e.g., data on housing, economic conditions, conserved lands, and anticipated population changes. The information from your community assessment in Step 1 can frame and focus the discussion and keep it firmly rooted in real issues and possibilities.

Keep the entire process open and transparent with information that is freely and widely shared. Develop a plan to reach as many people willing to participate as possible, in whatever way may be meaningful to them. As discussed in the introduction of this module, there are a variety of methods and tools that can be used to share information and engage people in creating a community vision.

For a great example of a visioning process, check out the [website](#) Richmond created for their planning process, which documents the steps they've taken and presents community data as well as the results of their visioning process.



Visioning for Downtown Poultney. Clockwise from top left: pop-up chalkboard; tear-off flier for on-line responses; word cloud of responses. Image Credit: Community Workshop LLC.



2.2.5. Community Engagement Process: Tools to Gather Input



Bennington; Image Credit: Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC)

A successful community participation process must go beyond hearing from “the usual suspects” – those who are frequently at events and public meetings due to their availability or special interest advocacy. Get creative and reach out to all types of people.

There are many ways to engage the community. The following pages offer recommendations, ideas, and resources.

Advisory Committee

A dedicated committee can choose outreach methods, identify key contacts, and advise on complex or controversial issues. Members may represent the community at large or include local business owners, advocates, or residents with relevant knowledge.

Traditional Outreach

Meeting notices: This traditional format works well in high-traffic, public places like schools, town offices, transfer stations, or stores.

Direct mail: Many people get so much email they miss messages, while others rarely check email or lack Internet access. Flyers and postcards still reach these audiences well, especially when the message is clear, concise, and under one page.

Telephone: The phone is a great tool for reminding people about meetings or following up on issues or concerns.



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Community Values Mapping

Community values mapping shows not only what people care about but also where these valued features exist in town. These may include recreation areas, scenic views, farmland, wildlife habitat, or hunting access as well as a shared vista, swimming hole, historic store, archaeological site, or local school. Understanding how values connect to places helps the community set goals and plan investments, while revealing common interests that support municipal planning.

Digital Outreach and On-Line Events

Town websites: Post meeting agendas, minutes, fact sheets, maps, reports, contacts, and other information here, but remember not everyone has Internet access.

Email lists: Partner with Town organizations who have established email lists.



Snowmass, CO; Image Credit: SE Group

What should Bennington be like in the future?

Come share your ideas on the challenges and opportunities of living, working, and learning in Bennington. We invite all community members: residents, workers, business owners, and visitors. Your input will guide town policy into the future!



Saturday, January 20

10:30 AM-12:00 PM

Bennington Recreation Center

Wednesday, January 24

5:00-6:30 PM

Zoom (online meeting)

Thursday, February 15

5:30-7:00 PM

Mt. Anthony Union Middle School

Wednesday, February 21

12:00-1:30 PM

Bennington Firehouse

Saturday, March 2

2:00-3:30 PM

Bennington Free Library



To register:
tinyurl.com/bton2050



Front Porch Forum: Front Porch Forum, or another type of electronic bulletin board, is a quick and cost-effective way to distribute and gather information from the community.

Social media: Platforms like Facebook, Instagram and X encourage engagement and participation, making them useful for sharing information and gathering feedback. However, poorly managed social media can backfire.

Online surveys: Surveys help gather feedback and gauge public opinion, especially for project priorities. Keep questions simple and free of jargon. Online tools like SurveyMonkey make surveys easy to run and generate clear reports and graphics to share results.

Webinars: These are a low-cost way to allow participation in meetings from home.



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Partner Outreach

Partner with local businesses: Print your educational materials on placemats or drink coasters; provide QR codes at tables and registers.

Newspaper articles and editorials: Many Vermonters read print or online versions of their local newspaper, making them a terrific place to share your information.

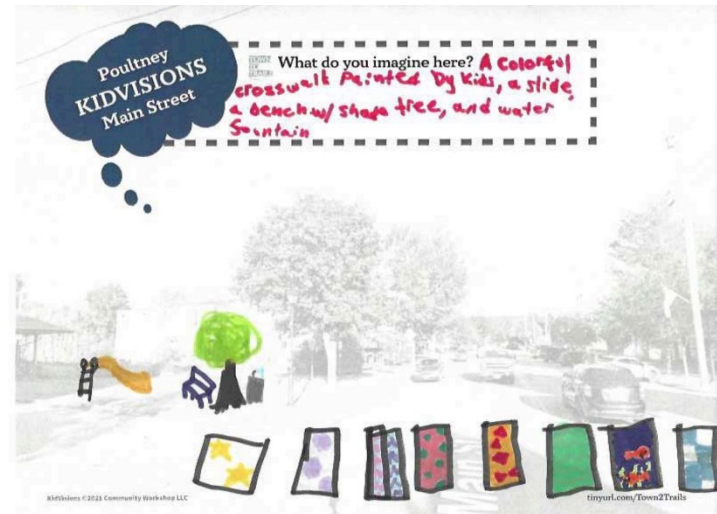
Schools: Coordinate with local schools to gather input from students.

In-Person Events

Walk-and-talk sessions: Meeting around tables, seated in chairs, has its place, but walking and talking side by side is a good way to set people at ease and encourage a free exchange of ideas. This is especially the case when considering particular parcels or areas of the town that may be considered for development, or conservation.

Public forums: Providing food and refreshments — especially near mealtime — can help draw a bigger crowd to informal discussions. However, individuals who are more comfortable speaking in public can sometimes dominate these meetings. A good strategy to overcome this is breaking up into smaller groups of 6 to 10, and having a “hands on” activity that engages people’s visual and tactile abilities.

Open houses: These gatherings are typically a more informal way to gather feedback using displays, handouts, a repeating slideshow, interactive maps, and other activities to educate or gather input.



Poultney “KidVisions”; Image Credit: Community Workshop LLC



Examples of outdoor, interactive gatherings in Fairlee. Image Credit: Community Workshop. LLC



Lyndonville; Image Credit: SE Group

Focus groups: These small group meetings (usually from 6 to 10 people) are designed to gather the perspectives/opinions of a specific group. Participants often are selected based on their knowledge of a particular subject matter or location, but they can also involve a broader cross section of community members. The back-and-forth exchange of information can lead to creative ideas and solutions.

Workshops or Charettes: A formal gathering community members together to work through specific topics, design ideas, or problems. A charrette is a focused, collaborative process where community members work intensively over 2 to 5 days to develop a shared vision or

solution. It concentrates attention on a specific issue, allowing for rapid learning, feedback, and problem-solving. Often used for neighborhood design or village redevelopment, charrettes can also help shape a municipal plan's vision.

“SWOT” Analysis: A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis helps a group respond to a community assessment by defining shared values, concerns, and priorities. Once you list, discuss, and agree on key points about current conditions, you can better shape a vision for the future.

Other Ideas

Photography contests: Invite residents to submit photos of special places in town and share the photos in a slideshow to help identify visual preferences shared by the community. Offering prizes can encourage participation and can help raise awareness for your planning effort.

Community Message Boards: Create a public chalk board or message board with question prompts that people can write on at their leisure.

Focusing your efforts on one or two large events with broad participation is more effective than holding many small meetings that can cause “meeting fatigue” and attract only the same attendees. Build excitement with multiple ways to participate. Hold events at various times to fit different schedules, and offer food and childcare if possible.



Hyde Park; Image Credit: DuBois & King



Resources

If you are interested in learning more, check out these useful resources related to different approaches to visioning:

- [Vermont Digital Economy Project Guides](#), Vermont Council on Rural Development. Information and examples on using digital communication tools with an emphasis on guidance for local governments.
- [Community Visioning Handbook: How to Imagine - and Create - a Better Future](#), Maine State Planning Office. Includes a visioning explanation and guide; useful “How To” steps; and public workshop instructions, tips, and exercises.
- [Participation Tools for Better Community Planning](#), CivicWell. An overview of public participation tools to help communities plan.
- [Virtual Engagement Tools and Best Practices](#), CivicWell. Resources to create and enhance effective community engagement processes at the local level.

Crafting and honing a community vision is often the hardest part of this process. However, your vision can only become a reality once it is broken down into organized, actionable elements. Step 3 will walk you through the process to create the goals and objectives to help ensure that your community vision and plan become a reality.

Case Study: Bennington

In 2023, Bennington launched its public engagement efforts for the [Town Plan update](#) by hiring the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) through a Municipal Planning Grant. The Town began by creating a community engagement plan to gather broad public input.

The plan included traditional outreach methods such as public meetings—organized by topic and held at various locations across town—and community-wide surveys. To reach underrepresented voices, the Town partnered with organizations like the Vermont Center for Independent Living and Queer Connect Bennington. These groups helped host invite-only roundtables designed to foster open discussion in smaller, more familiar settings.

BCRC also worked with local schools to involve students directly. Every student received a postcard to complete during class. Younger children drew pictures, while older students responded to questions about their vision for Bennington in 2050. Teachers received short informational videos that explained the town planning process and guided students through the activity.



9
Hello from Bennington in 2050!



Sincerely,

Dear 2023 Bennington,

The year is 2050! Bennington is more

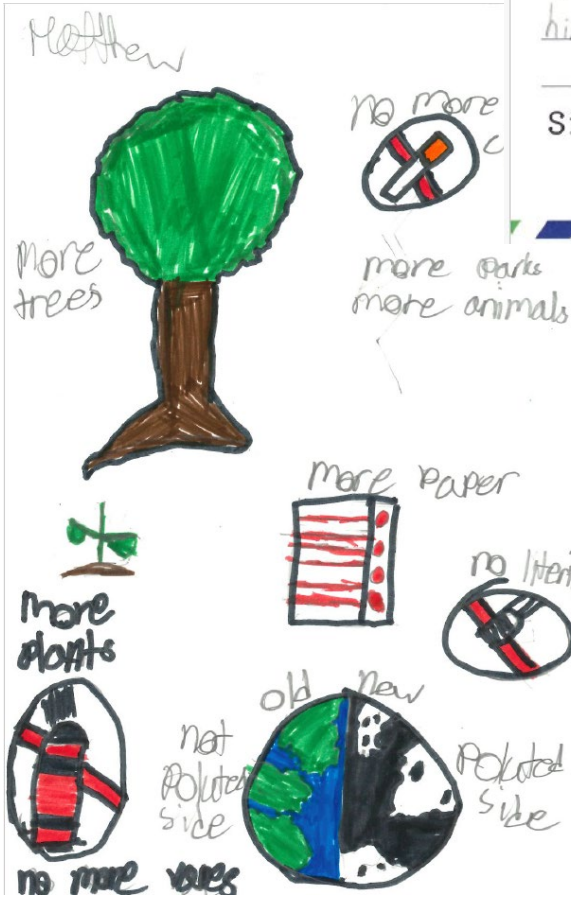
full electric green energy, more industry
and less violence and better schooling
and less homeless

thanks in part to the actions you took to make our
community better, such as . . .

building more green energy producers and
hiring more people and building houses

Sincerely,

Colton

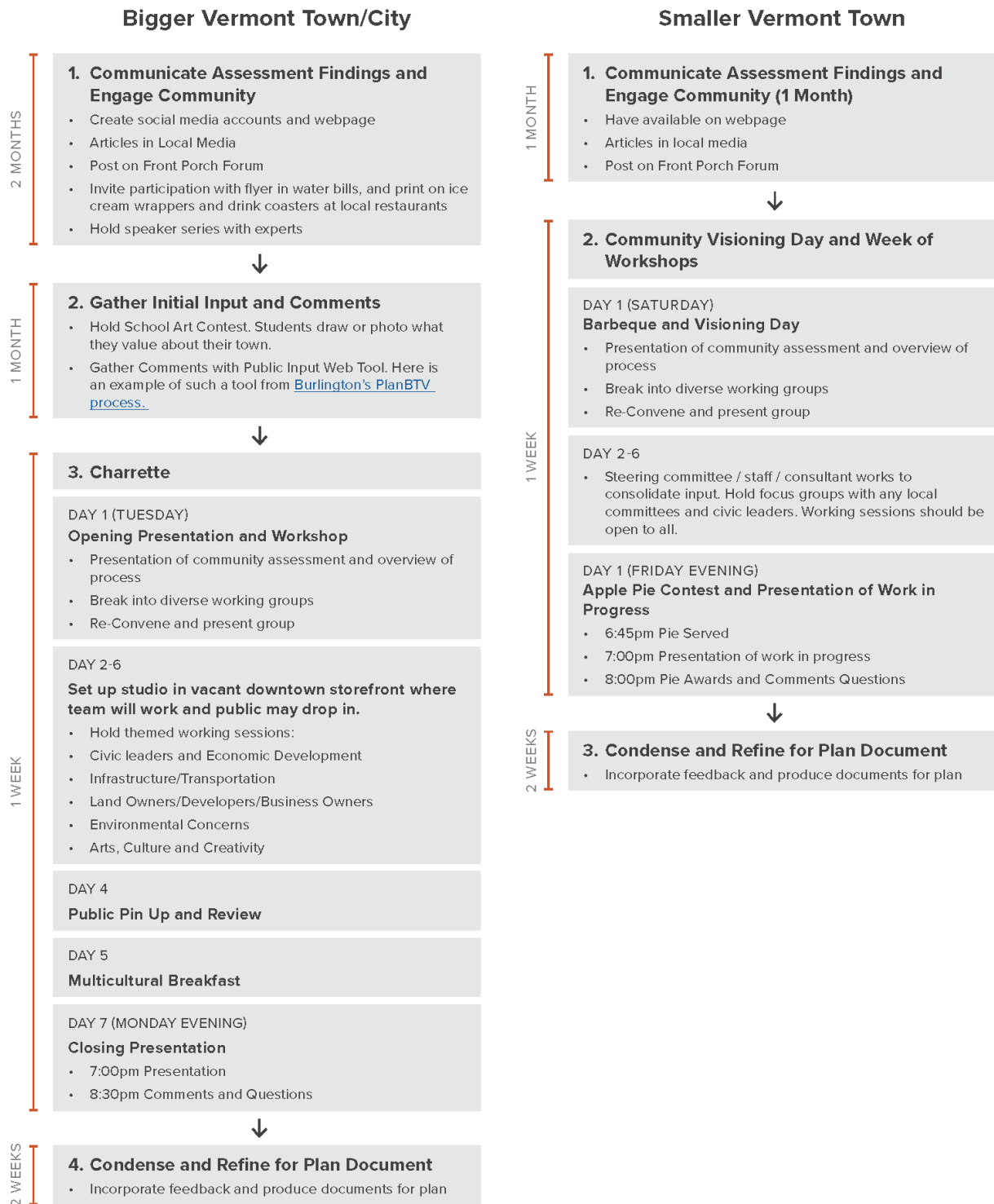


Sincerely, Homes for
everyone





Example Visioning Processes and Timelines





2.3. Step 3: Define Community Goals and Objectives

Once you have collaborated on a community vision, it is time to identify the goals and objectives that will move your community toward making this vision a reality.

This section of the module, in addition to describing the terms “goals” and “objectives,” defines “policies” and “actions.” While the focus of Step 3 is to identify your goals and objectives, it is helpful to understand how they are linked to the actions and policies that will be evaluated and prioritized in Step 5.

The remainder of this section highlights relevant state goals for each of the required elements of your plan, including:

1. Economic development
2. Natural resources
3. Transportation
4. Utilities facilities and services
5. Energy
6. Historic and cultural resources
7. Housing
8. Flood resilience and hazard mitigation
9. Land use

Each section includes questions to help you define goals and objectives. The level of detail will depend on your community’s needs. One community may prioritize flood resilience and protecting rivers, while another focuses on housing. Focus on what matters most to achieve your vision.

Use the assessment and key points from Step 1 to identify challenges and opportunities, and to guide your goals and objectives. While Step 3 centers on defining goals and objectives, begin brainstorming potential actions to support them. These ideas don’t need full evaluation yet—they’ll be reviewed and prioritized in Step 5. At a minimum, define goals and objectives for the listed topic areas. Details will vary based on local issues.

Each upcoming section, organized by topic, outlines relevant state land use goals and statutory requirements. When possible, use existing language from the statewide or regional plan goals instead of creating new content.

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) provides an [online collection](#) of approved municipal plans and bylaws from communities across Vermont.



2.3.1. Statewide Planning Goals

The following is a **summary** of the 15 statewide planning goals for Vermont. For the complete text, see Appendix 1.

- To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.
- To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.
- To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.
- To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.
- To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:
- To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources.
- To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.
- To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.
- To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.
- To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.
- To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.
- To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.
- To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.
- To encourage flood resilient communities.
- To provide the opportunity for the meaningful participation of all individuals, with particular attention to environmental justice focus populations, in the development, implementation, or enforcement of any law, regulation, or policy.



2.3.2. Goals, Objectives, Policies, and Actions: What's the Difference?



Milton; Image Credit: DuBois & King

As aligned with the 15 State Planning Goals, your municipal plan is required by state law to provide:

A statement of objectives, policies, and programs of the municipality to guide the future growth and development of land, public services, and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Think of goals, objectives, policies, and actions as a hierarchy with the broadest goals at the top, with each following category becoming more specific, with actions and their implementation programs being the most detailed. Some municipal plans label objectives as “strategies” and actions as “tactics,” while others only use three levels. This approach works as long as the terms are consistent and clearly communicate the purpose and outcomes of the plan.

Use clear language with active verbs like study, adopt, enforce, and create. Refer to the community assessment in Step 1 and the community vision in Step 1 to get started.

Goals

Goals state an overall purpose and destination that reflects the vision for the community. They convey an overarching principle that guides decision-making, providing a framework for the more detailed objectives, policies, action statements, and implementation programs.

Municipal plan goals must be clear, challenging yet achievable, and internally consistent. Achieving one goal should not conflict with another or allow for broad misinterpretation.



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NOTE: *Instead of starting from scratch, you can choose to adopt some or all of the 15 statewide planning goals in 24 V.S.A. §4302(c) as your local goals. Relevant goals from the regional plan could be used the same way. Starting from already-established goals can save time and help promote consistency with the statewide goals and compatibility with the regional plan. Then, you can develop specific objectives and actions that will customize those goals to align with your community's vision.*

Objectives

Objectives set targets for achieving goals. They should be specific enough for the municipality to know when they are met. Effective objectives are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The time frame should be clear: long term like 5 to 10 years, medium term, like 2 to 5 years, and short term, like 1 to 2 years.

Policies

Policies are specific actions adopted to achieve your objectives and guide decision-making across municipal departments. For example, some municipalities have detailed policies on limiting sewer line extensions or policies to maintain clear lines of communication between all the local boards and commissions. Not all goals require policies, but they help ensure consistency when needed.

The term “policy” is used in some Vermont plans as an umbrella term referring to all statements of intent, encompassing the goals and objectives. “Policy” has also been used interchangeably with “objective.” You can choose to use the terms that best communicate the intent of your community.

Actions

Actions are the next steps needed to move toward achieving the objectives and the goals. These are concrete activities that can be described in specific terms. Actions should identify the responsible party (such as a department, board, commission, or committee), the time frame for accomplishment (long, medium, or short term), and any necessary resources to get the job done. Actions also include “programs.”

Programs

Programs are organized activities or resources for implementing the actions of the municipal plan. Municipalities may have a variety of existing programs such as a farmland protection effort or a façade improvement program. Involvement in regional, state, or federal programs may also be recommended for furthering a goal. Your plan might recommend the creation of a new program such as instituting a village improvement committee or creating a town hazard mitigation fund, if those do not exist.



Past Examples of Goals, Objectives, Policies, and Actions: Good and Bad

Bad Examples

Goal

Make the community more walkable and bicycle friendly.

Too vague. The goal needs to provide a clearer picture of where you want to go and what you want to become. This goal gives little direction and could be interpreted many ways.

Objective

Encourage the construction of sidewalks and bike paths.

Where? Everywhere? This does not provide a clear step toward reaching the goal and provides no achievable outcome. Note that the term “encourage” is not meaningful in this context and should be replaced with a more action oriented verb.

Policy

All town boards and commissions should consider the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians in their decision-making.

What decisions? Do the town boards and commissions have enough information to make meaningful decisions? Note that the term “should” and the overly broad scope of this policy make it impossible to recognize whether the policy is being applied.

Actions

Seek funding to pay for new bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

This action item should state who is responsible for what and when the action should be completed. Information regarding specific funding sources are also easily obtained and should be included.

Good Examples

Goal

Integrate Complete Streets approaches and design features into road construction, upgrades, and maintenance to create safe and inviting environments for all users to walk, bicycle, and use public transportation.

Objective

Establish a network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that connects the village neighborhood district to the village center. (Target: Increase percentage of residents walking or bicycling to work by 10 percent in 2020.)

Policy

Sidewalk upgrades focused on major arterial routes will be a funding priority and included annually in the capital budget.

Actions

- Prepare a sidewalk plan for the village and neighborhood districts to improve existing sidewalks and identify new pedestrian and bicycle connections for improved access throughout the village and adjoining neighborhoods.

Responsible: Village Improvement Committee and Select Board

Completion: November 2017

Funding/Assistance: Seek Municipal Planning Grant funds

- Update the land use regulations so that all new development and redevelopment projects in the village and neighborhood districts include pedestrian facilities that conform to the sidewalk plan.

Responsible: Planning Commission

Completion: March 2018

Funding/Assistance: Planning Commission budget with help from the Regional Planning Commission



Examples of Statements of Objectives

Here are examples of overall statements of objectives from three Vermont communities. Two of these, Rockingham and St. Johnsbury, also utilize the Maintain, Evolve, Transform approach described in earlier when considering the community vision.

Rockingham

Adopted September 24, 2024

The Rockingham Town Plan, reflecting the “Maintain | Evolve | Transform” vision, sets out to guide the future of the community through various objectives tailored to address specific areas of growth, conservation, and development. These objectives are designed to leverage the town's unique characteristics while addressing current challenges and opportunities, aiming for a future that balances growth with sustainability and community well-being. Key objectives identified in the plan include:

- Guide development towards existing villages and hamlets with municipal services, preserving rural land in outlying areas.
- Encourage mixed-use redevelopment in downtown Bellows Falls.
- Revise land use regulations in rural areas to support low-density development while conserving natural resources and maintaining the scenic landscape.
- Direct development away from flood-prone areas to protect human life and natural resources.
- Support economic development initiatives that align with the town's character and infrastructure capacity.
- Promote housing diversity and affordability to meet the community's needs.
- Enhance transportation infrastructure to support sustainable and efficient movement within and around the town.
- Encourage community and economic activities that contribute to a vibrant, healthy, and resilient Rockingham.
- Promote historic preservation and sensitive adaptation of historic structures, landscapes, and neighborhoods.

St. Johnsbury

Readopted April 28, 2025

St Johnsbury is in the process of readopting their plan, and they use the “Maintain Evolve Transform” approach:

It is our mission to maintain and protect St. Johnsbury’s assets so as to enable and sustain economic growth through new business, tourism, and creative endeavors. We are actively evolving to position the town for economic growth: target strong businesses and industry that advance the policies of the town; diversify our workforce; increase our



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housing stock for young professionals, established retirees, young families, second home owners, and residents requiring supported housing; and increase our tourism market share. We intend to execute plans that will transform our standard of health and well-being while supporting town policies and measuring for success and sustainability.

Tunbridge

Adopted December 14, 2021

The following overall goals are important to our town: • To remain a rural, agricultural town by supporting and encouraging agricultural activities in Tunbridge – the primary and fundamental intention of Tunbridge. • To plan for the controlled and orderly growth of the town, utilizing a pattern that maintains Tunbridge’s rural character. • To promote a healthful environment for our citizens, and insure adequate and clean waters and air. • To encourage the development of small-scale enterprises in the Villages of Tunbridge and North Tunbridge that provide basic skills and services for all of the citizens of Tunbridge, which will enhance and improve the rural way of life. • To ensure necessary public facilities and services within an expressed plan at a reasonable cost. • To provide recreational opportunities for townspeople. • To help provide employment and housing opportunities that allow for affordable living in Tunbridge for people of all ages. • To ensure natural resource conservation.

Municipalities are free to create goals and objectives that go beyond the elements required by statute. For example, you may choose to set municipal goals relating to public health, population loss, and climate change. If your town incorporates such goals, it’s important to focus on local initiative, rather than relying solely upon on state, national or international actions.



2.3.3. Economic Development

Statutory Requirement: *a description of the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identify policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.*

Statewide Goal for Economic Development: To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

The economy is a primary driver of change, and the economic future of your community needs to be integral to your shared vision. Whether you're a rural town focused on farming and forestry or an urban area growing new businesses, clear economic goals can help you achieve that vision.

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What, in terms of economic development, will need to happen for us to realize our vision?
- Where and what kind of opportunities, by sector, would we like to see maintained, evolved, or transformed?
- What does our assessment tell us about the challenges in making these opportunities a reality?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Based on our shared vision and conditions outlined in the assessment, what are some realistic targets we can set for ourselves?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What departments or boards need to be involved?
- What related policies (land use, transportation, housing, etc.) should be revisited to encourage the type of economic development we are envisioning?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions, projects, and programs to evaluate in Step 5?

Refer to any [comprehensive economic development strategy](#) that has been developed in your region. If your community was recently involved in developing such a strategy and it is specific enough and supportive of your vision, you might consider using parts of it in your plan.



2.3.4. Natural Resources

Statutory Requirement: *A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas.*

Statewide Goals for Natural Resources: To identify, protect, and preserve important natural features of the Vermont landscape, including significant natural and fragile areas; outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shore lands, and wetlands; significant scenic roads, waterways, and views. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources. To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

Vermont's natural beauty and environment shape its identity and influence why people choose to live here. Natural resources provide services such as clean water and air and offer recreation like hiking or boating that support our tourism economy. Communities can set clear goals and objectives to protect these resources and guide their use, such as managing sand and gravel excavation.

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What natural resources are part of our vision, and what must be conserved to realize our vision?
- Where are important habitat blocks or rare threatened and endangered species located in our community?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Based on our shared vision and any environmental indicators identified in the assessment, what are some realistic environmental quality targets we can set for ourselves?
- What are the priority areas we would like to see preserved?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Where do we need to update our bylaws and/or zoning?
- How else can we meet our environmental targets and objectives?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions, projects, and programs we should evaluate in Step 5?



2.3.5. Transportation

Statutory Requirement: *A map of prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing ... proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads, and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need.*

Statewide Goal for Transportation: To provide for safe, convenient, economic, and energy-efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers. Highways, air, rail, and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced, and integrated.

Our transportation network connects us to friends and neighbors, provides trade corridors, gets us to our jobs, links us to recreation opportunities, and often provides spectacular views of Vermont's landscape. Utilizing community assessment data and the community vision, identify what future facilities and services are needed to maintain or improve the existing transportation system. A final map of these facilities should coincide with your future land use map (see [Step 4](#)).

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Are there any new transportation facilities (paths/roads/parking, etc.) included in our vision?
- What are our community priorities in terms of making transportation improvements?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- How can we improve our existing infrastructure to realize our vision?
- Where does the assessment point to deficiencies in the transportation system?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Do our existing policies, such as public works specifications and practices, support our vision?
- How do our existing policies relate to other goals, such as housing and economic development?
- Does our transportation infrastructure and policies meet the needs of a diverse population?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions and projects we should evaluate in Step 5?



2.3.6. Utilities, Facilities, and Services

Statutory Requirement: *A map and statement of prospective community facilities and public utilities showing ... proposed educational, recreational, and other public sites, buildings, and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services, with indications of priority of need, costs, and method of financing. An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of ... projected uses and the local public school system.*

Statewide Goals for Utilities, Facilities, and Services: Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

To plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs. Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply, and sewage and solid waste disposal. The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care workforce development.

The location of certain municipal facilities — sewer, water supply, fire stations, schools, and even the town hall and library — can influence the way your community changes as powerfully as zoning regulations. Decisions to create plans and policies and to invest taxpayer funds into public facilities demonstrate a community's priorities and need to be coordinated with your land use regulations to support your vision.

In addition to demographic information, consider issues such as possible school consolidation or expansion, or if child care services in the area are adequate. Your regional plan may provide a framework that can help you address facilities and services in your plan. A final map of your prospective utilities, facilities and services should coincide with your future land use map (see Step 4.)



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Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What, in terms of changes to facilities utilities and services, will need to happen for us to realize our vision?
- What does our assessment tell us about the challenges in making these changes a reality?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What utilities/facilities/services are the most critical to our vision?
- Based on the conditions outlined in the assessment, what are some realistic targets we can set for ourselves?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are the estimated costs and possible funding sources associated with our priorities?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions and projects we should evaluate in Step 5?

Refer to any initiatives or strategies your region as developed for utilities, facilities, or services. If your community has created efforts that align with your vision and include useful details, consider including parts of them in your plan.



2.3.7. Energy

Statutory Requirement: *A statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy; a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources; a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy.*

Statewide Goal for Energy: To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. (A) General strategies for achieving these goals include increasing the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings; identifying areas suitable for renewable energy generation; encouraging the use and development of renewable or lower emission energy sources for electricity, heat, and transportation; and reducing transportation energy demand and single occupancy vehicle use. (B) Specific strategies and recommendations for achieving these goals are identified in the State energy plans prepared under 30 V.S.A. §§ 202 and 202b.

Cost savings are one of many reasons to include energy goals and objectives in your plan. Municipal plans are considered in Vermont's regulatory process for siting energy generating facilities, including solar and wind installations, and allows towns and regions to indicate preferred locations for those installations through enhanced planning (see [Step 1](#)). See [Appendix 2](#) for guidance on how your plan can be used to influence renewable energy facility siting decisions.

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Does any part of our vision require changes in our energy infrastructure?
- What are the most efficient and cost-effective ways to reduce municipal energy consumption?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Where are the best locations for renewable energy generation facilities?
- Where can people save energy by living close to jobs and services?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Based on our shared vision and the data available in our assessment, what are some realistic targets we can set for ourselves in terms of energy consumption/generation?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions and projects we should evaluate in Step 5?



2.3.8. Historic and Cultural Resources

Statutory Requirement: ... policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable ... scenic and historic features and resources.

Statewide Goal for Historic and Cultural Resources: To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including significant scenic roads, waterways and views, important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites, and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Vermont's distinctive character of historic buildings, working landscapes, villages, and small cities results from community and statewide efforts to preserve these important resources. Review your inventory of cultural and historic resources conducted during the community assessment, and select goals and objectives aligned with your vision for these resources. Refer to the Village Center and/or Downtown Designations (see Module 2) and how they can support the preservation and revitalization of historic buildings.

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are the most important historical and cultural resources? How important are they to our vision?
- What is it about these resources that make them part of our vision?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Are there existing plans and measures in place to preserve and/ or enhance these resources or is our community at risk of losing them?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some targets we can set for ourselves that would show that we've succeeded in preserving our important resources?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions and projects that will help us realize our vision of historic and cultural resources that we should evaluate in Step 5?



2.3.9. Housing

Statutory Requirement: ... a recommended program for addressing low- and moderate-income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission pursuant to subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title. The program should account for permitted accessory dwelling units.

Statewide Goal for Housing: To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

(A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.

(B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.

(C) Sites for multifamily and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.

(D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single-family residences that provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives, elders, or persons who have a disability should be allowed.

Housing, particularly as it relates to affordability, affects many other parts of your community, ranging from the ability to attract businesses and young people to energy and transportation demands. Goals and objectives should address housing needs identified in [Step 1](#), and as described in your Regional Plan's housing targets.

Consider both short- and long-term goals, as well as the housing targets provided by your regional planning commission: does the municipality have appropriate housing types for current and future needs; whether new housing developments will be needed; or how to rehabilitate an aging housing stock. Review and incorporate the goals and requirements of the [state](#) and federal [Fair Housing Acts](#), which aim to actively reduce barriers to housing options by people who have historically been excluded or those that have special needs when seeking homes. These can include families with children, racial and ethnic minorities, and residents with mobility restrictions. Consider how your local land use policies can affect the availability of homes for a diverse set of needs while creating or updating your plan.



Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- How much and what type of new housing needs to be built and how does our existing housing stock need to change in order to meet our housing needs now and over the next five, 10, and 20 years?
- What are the housing needs of low- and moderate-income households as identified by the regional planning commission, and is it likely that these housing needs are met with the existing plans and programs in place?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Considering the different challenges and opportunities highlighted in our assessment, what are some realistic targets we can set for ourselves?
- Do we have an approach for accessory dwelling units, and do we want to include these as infill housing options? What do we need to do to make ADUs easier to build?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What needs to change in order for these housing needs to be met? Are there existing barriers to housing development within our policies or bylaws that should be revisited?
- Where does our vision include new housing or changes to our existing housing stock?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What are some possible actions, projects, and programs we should evaluate in Step 5?

Note: Vermont law defines housing as affordable if it can be owned or rented by people with a household income that is 80 percent of the county median for a cost not more than 30 percent of the household income.



2.3.10. Flood Resilience and Hazard Mitigation

Statutory Requirement: *A flood resilience plan that (i) identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designates those areas to be protected, including flood plains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; and (ii) recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated under subdivision (12)(A)(i) of this subsection and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.*

Statewide Goal for Flood Resilience: To encourage flood-resilient communities.

(A) New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.

(B) The protection and restoration of flood plains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.

(C) Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged.

Most municipalities prepare [Local Hazard Mitigation Plans](#) for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to identify actions that will help prevent the hazards they face from floods to pandemics. In Vermont, by far the most common and costly hazard facing communities is flooding.

[FEMA records](#) show the state has experienced flooding every year since 2007, and had at least one federally declared disaster (flood or storm) in 29 of the past 35 years. For this reason, municipalities are required to specifically address the community's ability to respond to floods in the municipal plan.

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Does our assessment in [Step 1](#) point to any flood hazard mitigation actions we aren't taking and should be?
- Are any parts of our vision threatened by the potential for future flooding or other hazards?



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Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Where do we need to protect existing vulnerable settlements (including critical infrastructure, historic resources, and other investments)?
- What are some opportunities we have to make our community safer?
- Do we have enough information to identify and prioritize projects to reduce our vulnerability to future flooding events?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Where is it safe for new development; where should we limit development?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Is your town's current local hazard mitigation plan (LHMP) up to date? If not, contact your regional planning commission to identify what needs to be added or updated to be compliant. (Updated, approved LHMPs qualify your municipality to obtain additional state funding to recover from disasters.)



2.3.11. Land Use

Statutory Requirement: *A land use plan consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses that:*

(A) *Indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural land identification process described in 6 V.S.A. § 8), residence, commerce industry, public, and semi-public uses, and open spaces, areas reserved for flood plain, and areas identified by the State, the regional planning commission, or the municipality that require special consideration for aquifer protections, for wetland protection, for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors, or form other conservation purposes.*

(B) *Sets forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity, and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and service.*

(C) *Identifies those areas, if any, proposed for state designation under chapter 76A of this title, together with, for each area proposed for state designation, an explanation of how the designation would further the plan's goals and the goals of section 4302 of this title, and how the area meets the requirements for the type of designation to be sought.*

(D) *Indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests. A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the municipality*

Statewide Land Use Goals: To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both, and should be encouraged in growth centers designated under chapter 76A of this title.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.



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(D) Development should be undertaken in accordance with smart growth principles as defined in subdivision 2791(13) of this title.

The land use goals and objectives your community adopts should tie your vision together and reflect the other goals and objectives in your plan. [Step 4](#) goes into detail about how to create a land use plan, how to map your future land use, and how your community should develop over the course of the planning time frame.

Goal-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Does the zoning district map accurately represent the vision and goals you have for maintaining, evolving and transforming different sections of our community?

Objective-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- If the zoning district lines have become outdated in terms of your vision and goals for each section of town, where and how should district lines change to reflect plans for additional growth, or additional restrictions on development?

Policy-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- Are additional zoning districts needed to fine-tune the policy or character envisioned for specific sections of town, such as neighborhoods adjacent to downtowns or village centers, or to better protect forest blocks or wetlands?

Action-Setting Questions for Consideration:

- What changes or improvements to public infrastructure, such as improving roads or adding water or wastewater services, will be needed to accommodate sections of town where growth is anticipated?



2.4. Step 4: Map Out the Future



Your municipal plan is required to include a map and a statement of existing and proposed land uses, visually bringing together goals and objectives, and the areas to maintain, evolve and transform.

In this step, we outline how to map out:

- Future land uses
- Prospective community utilities, facilities, and services necessary to support the envisioned land use conditions
- Areas to be considered for the state designation programs (see Module 2)
- Forest, agriculture, recreation and public open space lands to be conserved and managed.
- Relationship between regional future land use mapping and local future land use mapping

These maps, which have long been a part of local and regional planning, lay the groundwork for future development regulations and help guide community investments. A future land use map visually communicates key components of a community's vision for change, investment, and preservation. It reflects expected land demand based on past trends and projections, showing desired—not current—land uses within the planning period. In short, the map guides how the community anticipates and manages land use change.



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The future land use map is not a zoning map. Many communities choose not to include the zoning map in the municipal plan, since zoning is regulatory. However, like the municipal plan guides bylaw creation, the future land use map guides zoning maps, if the community has or wants zoning. On its own, the future land use map neither grants nor removes property rights.

2.4.1. Recent Change to Regional Future Land Use Mapping

Though municipalities and regions have done future land use mapping for decades, [Act 181](#), passed in June 2024, makes changes to how land use is planned and coordinated across Vermont at the state, regional, and local levels. One of the key tools in this new system is the **Future Land Use Map**, which are proposed by regional planning commissions. While often rooted in current land use patterns, the map also envisions desired futures. For example, these maps show which areas are designated for future housing, conservation, or other uses, based on the environment, infrastructure, and community needs.

These regional maps are created with input from towns and cities. Once a regional map is approved by the state [Land Use Review Board \(LURB\)](#), it will determine which areas are exempt from Act 250 review (owns can choose whether they want to take advantage of these exemptions — more on that in [Appendix 1](#)).

Regional maps will also be used along with housing goals set at the state and regional level to identify where new housing should be built in your community. Your **Regional Planning Commission** is available to work with your town to update local plans and policies in a way that supports these housing goals, and reflects your community's vision for the future.

These changes will help create a clearer picture of land use across the whole state, making it easier to plan for transportation, utilities, housing, and conservation. The maps use **10 land use categories**, which connect to the **State Designation Program** explained in Module 2.

At the local level, towns can choose to use the same categories as the regional maps — but it's not required. Local maps will be reviewed to make sure they're generally in line with the regional plans, even if the categories are a little different.



2.4.2. Creating the Future Land Use Map

For each of the land use categories identified in the plan, you need to identify the **location**, **amount**, **intensity**, and **character** of such land uses. We provide some examples below of how you might approach this task .

The community assessment completed in Step 1, the vision articulated in Step 2, and the goals created in Step 3 set the foundation for the future land use map. The following process may be used to integrate those pieces into a future land use map.

- Review the “existing natural features map” created in Step 1 to see where development constraints (such as steep slopes, flood plains and wetlands) and opportunities might exist.
- Examine your “existing land use map” to understand where uses are currently located in your community. Note that the existing land use map should depict the actual existing land uses, not a previously adopted “future land use map” or the existing zoning map.
- Review the vision and goals developed in Steps 2 and 3, and see how they relate to the existing land use, considering whether any of the existing uses need to be modified or if new land areas are needed to achieve the vision and goals.
- If you created a “Maintain/Evolve/Transform” map in Step 2, compare it to your existing land use map (and existing zoning map) to see what changes the future land use map needs to show.
- Decide whether or not it is appropriate to categorize land for growth beyond the extent of your existing built-up area based on projected needs and the potential for development in your community. The designation methodology outlined in Module 2 can help guide the sizing, and location, of any new areas under consideration for growth.

Regional vs. Local Future Land Use Map

Regional and local land use mapping are separate yet related efforts. RPCs create updates for future land use maps in conjunction with each municipality within their region. Municipalities can adopt the regional map, if desired, or can create their own categories. See Appendix 1 for information about ensuring compatibility between local and regional land use.

Once you map out and identify your land use categories (discussed below), you will want to review any community facilities and services necessary to support your proposed land uses (covered in more detail later in Step 4). The feasibility of service/facility expansions as well as their compatibility with your goals and vision should be considered, and you may find that you need to adjust your future land use map in instances where those expansions aren’t possible. Similarly, you should evaluate the compatibility of your land



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uses with other goals, such as natural areas your community has identified as priority conservation areas.

Goals such as future farmland protection and transportation access go hand in hand with planning how our communities may grow or otherwise change over time. For example, one of the your community's goals may include maintaining a viable agricultural economy. This issue relates both to housing development and to food security as well, so future land use maps need to consider not just currently viable farmland and soil, but also how we can support and even increase local farming opportunities in light of development pressures.

In this way, your future land use map as well as your goals may need to be revised to ensure they are compatible with each other, and that your plan gives a clear direction for the future based on the corresponding objectives, strategies, and action items.

The next few pages provide you with information to consider when locating and characterizing land uses for your future land use map.



2.4.3. Land Use Categories



The Transect Continuum Concept

When envisioning future land uses, it's helpful to understand that human activity typically falls along a continuum—from natural areas to rural landscapes to more developed village or urban settings. This continuum can be shown using a series of stages known as a “**transect.**”

Using a transect, we start with undeveloped areas—forests, wetlands, and waterways. Next come working lands – which may include farms and forests managed for timber. Then rural homes on large lots. As we move towards town centers, lot sizes shrink, road networks become more defined, and commercial uses increase. At the highest end of the transect are village, town, or city centers with the greatest density.

Interspersed along the transect may be exceptions, such as civic buildings, schools, factories, or large standalone stores, that don't follow the typical transect pattern.

The transect and standard land use categories align with Vermont's updated (2024) Act 250 location-based regulations and the new (2024) designation programs described earlier and in Module 2.

After discussing the transect-based concept of land use described above, we can now turn to the land use categories that will be included on your Future Land Use Map.



Regional Future Land Use Map Categories

Act 181 of 2024 directs all Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) to create new regional plans with consistent future land use maps, and work with each municipality to coordinate the work at the local level.

Also per Act 181, there are now 10 new regional land use categories. They are standardized so that each region of the state can coordinate regarding larger-scale considerations, such as around conservation, transportation, flood resilience, and fulfilling housing objectives.

These new standard future regional land use categories also relate directly to the updated state designation program. More on the transition to the new state designations is included in Module 2 of this Manual.

It's a good idea for your community to understand the new regional land use categories. When local planning aligns with regional and state planning, it becomes easier to address shared issues like transportation, conservation, and flood resilience—things that don't stop at town lines. The new regional land use categories are described below. However, your community's land use categories on its Future Land Use Map don't have to match them exactly.

The new standard regional future land use categories are:

1. Downtown and Village Centers
2. Planned Growth Areas
3. Village Areas
4. Transition or Infill Areas
5. Resource-based Recreation Areas
6. Enterprise Areas
7. Hamlets
8. Rural; general
9. Rural; agriculture and forestry
10. Rural; conservation

Downtown and Village Centers

These are the traditional and historic central business or civic centers. They have more commercial uses, higher residential density, mixed-use multi-story buildings, and more compact settlement patterns than other places in the municipality. They may run along a single linear main street, or stretch a few blocks along intersecting streets, with buildings typically located closer to the street or sidewalk than found in more rural areas. Village centers may or may not have public water or wastewater systems.



Planned Growth Areas

Within walking distance from a downtown or village center, PGAs are consistent with smart growth principles in areas that provide for housing. They are generally located outside flood hazard areas and are planned for high density and mixed-use development, with the infrastructure to support it.

Village Areas

These are traditional or proposed new settlement areas. They are generally located outside flood hazard areas, and they are within walking distance of a downtown or village center. They are planned and zoned for higher density, and they either have public water or wastewater, or the soils to support it.

Transition or Infill Areas

These areas are adjacent to planned growth or village areas, or may be stand-alone areas. They are served by or planned for water or wastewater, or both. These areas may include existing low density commercial development, but do not allow new strip development.

Resource-based Recreation Areas

These areas include large-scale resource-based recreational facilities, often concentrated around ski resorts, lakeshores, or concentrated trail networks, that may provide infrastructure, jobs, or housing to support recreational activities.

Enterprise Areas

These areas include locations of concentrated economic activity and employment that may or may not be adjacent to planned growth areas. These include industrial parks, areas of natural resource extraction, or other commercial uses that involve larger land areas. Enterprise areas typically have ready access to water supply, sewage disposal, electricity, and freight transportation networks.

Hamlets

Small historic clusters of homes and may include a school, place of worship, store, or other public buildings not planned for significant growth; no public water supply or wastewater systems; and often at rural road intersections. These may be depicted as points on the future land use map.

Rural - General

This category includes areas that promote the preservation of Vermont's traditional working landscape and natural area features. They allow for low-density residential and some limited commercial development that is compatible with productive lands and natural areas.



Rural - Agriculture and Forestry

These areas include blocks of forest or farmland that produce food, firewood, lumber and other everyday products, provide wildlife habitat and scenic beauty, and contribute to economic well-being and quality of life. Development in these areas should be carefully managed to promote the working landscape and rural economy, and address regional goals, while protecting the agricultural and forest resource values of these areas.

Rural - Conservation

These are areas of significant natural resources, identified by regional planning commissions or municipalities based upon existing Agency of Natural Resources mapping that require special consideration for wetland protection; for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors; or for other conservation purposes, such as wildlife movement, outdoor recreation, flood storage, aquifer recharge, and scenic beauty. The mapping of these areas and accompanying policies are intended to help meet requirements of 10 V.S.A. chapter 89. Any portion of this area that is approved by the LURB as having Tier 3 area status shall be identified on the future land use map as an overlay upon approval.



2.4.4. Aligning the Future Land Use Map with Community Goals

Once you have a draft of your future land use map, it's a good time to go back and review its compatibility with your goals.

You should review your goals in Step 3 and ask, "Is this future land use map advancing relevant to this goal, and is it supportive or does it prevent us from achieving our goal?" Resolve any inconsistencies, and revise any goals or the future land use map so they are aligned.

For example, you might have a stated goal to prioritize housing growth in an area that is currently zoned as low-density residential, which has been carried over onto your future land use map. This may require prioritizing one goal over another, based on discussions within the community. However, taking the time to resolve such inconsistencies can go a long way in preventing future conflict, such as if these planning documents do not support local zoning rules.

The next thing that will help turn your vision into reality is to map out the facilities, services, and infrastructure needed to support your future land use.

Mapping Future Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure

The future land use map identifies the desired uses and character of the community going forward, but to achieve that vision, the municipality may need new, improved, or expanded public facilities and services. (Or you may identify already-planned expansions that are actually not needed.)

State statute requires that to be approved, a municipal plan must include maps and statements of transportation, utility, and facility needs. Municipal facilities may include the following:

- Roads, sidewalks, bike paths, trails, and parking facilities
- Transit stops or hubs, railroad station, airports, and marinas
- Public electric vehicle charging stations
- Water supply sources, storage infrastructure and distribution networks
- Wastewater treatment and collection networks
- Stormwater management infrastructure such as inlets, culverts, and larger basins
- Public safety and emergency services hubs
- School buildings and school transportation networks
- Municipal offices and other governmental and civic buildings such as town halls



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- Parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities
- Libraries, cultural facilities, and community centers
- Solid waste disposal facilities such as transfer stations
- Public electricity generation and gas pipelines and high-voltage electric transmission lines

One of the primary functions of municipal planning is to anticipate and prepare for predictable public facility needs over the long term, to keep existing facilities in good working order and to create new and upgraded facilities when they are needed without sudden spikes in public expenditures.

A 20-year planning horizon provides a good time frame for projecting future facility needs in a municipal plan. It is long-term enough to meaningfully anticipate the life cycle needs of buildings and other large facilities, but short enough to enable reasonably accurate projections that can inform five-year capital programs and annual budgets. Selectboard members, public works directors, and others involved in public-facilities decisions need to be involved in assessing, mapping, and determining the timing and priorities for future facility needs sections of the municipal plan.

The locations of public facilities can strongly influence private land development decisions, so it is critical to coordinate investments in public facilities with the land use vision in the municipal plan. For example, a sewer line extension through farmland will generate demand for rezoning and developing those lands. Or expanding town offices in a village center rather than building a new facility on the outskirts will help support businesses and contribute to village revitalization. Mapping the likely locations of the new or expanded public facilities needed in the next 20 years helps to identify potential conflicts and signals the community's intentions.

One of the ways you can implement your vision is through the use of the state designation programs that can help promote development in and around your center(s). Along with the comprehensive description in Module 2, this the module also highlights the programs here in Step 4 because statute requires you to:

[Identify] those areas, if any, proposed for designation under chapter 76A of this title and for status under 10 V.S.A. §§ 6033 and 6034, together with, for each area proposed for designation, an explanation of how the designation would further the plan's goals and the goals of section 4302 of this title, and how the area meets the requirements for the type of designation to be sought.

Identify Existing or Proposed Areas for State Designation

Vermont offers a framework of state designations that encourages communities to maintain a pattern of compact centers surrounded by open countryside. The two designations — Centers and Neighborhoods — offer incentives to municipalities and individuals who invest in those places. They help align our environmental, housing, and transportation policies, programs, regulations, and public investments to maintain and



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enhance the landscape cherished by Vermonters and visitors alike. Module 2 of this manual explains how these designation programs work and how to access additional benefits through the designation process, such as applying for a Step 2 or Step 3 center designation.

Before applying for a step 2 center designation or higher, state statute requires that you identify any existing and proposed areas for state designation in the municipal plan. Your plan must explain how the designation would further the plan's goals, as well as the state planning goals. It also helps to explain how the area meets the requirements for the type of designation being sought.

Designation should be shown on the existing and future land use maps or on any other maps in the plan in a manner to corresponds to the future land use map in your regional plan. The future land use map should also show land use areas that generally correspond to the state designated areas, but the boundaries do not need to be exactly the same.

Now that you have figured out where you want to go, it is time to figure out how to get there. Step 5 will guide you in identifying the priority action items that make your vision a reality.

The Two State Designations

Act 181 of 2024 made major changes to the State's designation program, and is the result of public participation, community input, recommendations made by the Designation 2050 Report, and further legislative work. Key reforms include improved compatibility with local and regional plans, lower-barrier access for lower-capacity communities, administrative streamlining to save time and cost, and simplifying the designation requirements and benefits. The program will continue to extend place-based benefits to sustain and revitalize communities through smart growth, historic preservation, equity of opportunity and climate resilience.

The two reformed/new designations (Centers and Neighborhoods) are designed to support coordinated investments in compact places planned for efficient growth. Note that municipalities with one of the five existing designations will continue as before until new regional maps are prepared; no renewal or check-ins will be required. These existing areas have a direct path to recognition in the new regional plan maps and the two new designation categories, and they will lose no benefits during the transition period.

See Module 2 of this Manual for more guidance on applying for designation, maintaining existing designations, and the relationship between designation and future land use categories, specifically the "Downtown and Village Centers," "Planned Growth Areas," and "Village Areas."



2.5. Step 5: Make It Happen

Planning means very little if it doesn't produce the changes the community desires. Step 5 provides guidance to help you prioritize action items over the short term (one to two years), midterm (three to five years), and long term (six-plus years). Focus on the actions (such as public and private investments, strategic partnerships, policy changes, and funding sources) that are necessary to bring the plan to life.

A program to implement objectives is a required component of your plan. In Step 3, when you were developing the goals and objectives, you were encouraged to brainstorm the action items that could be used to implement those aspirations. Whether you did that or not, you will need to consider the ways that your plan can be implemented and determine which of those are most feasible and important.

All implementation programs should specify:

- Actions to be taken;
- Associated timelines for completion;
- Those responsible for action;
- Anticipated cost, if known;
- A way to evaluate their effectiveness, e.g., by including performance measures.

The following sections describe the actions that could be included in an implementation program as well as ways to evaluate alternatives and identify priorities.

Plans that Matter

Studies show that the most effective plans are those with a clear vision, measurable objectives, and strategies or actions designed to meet plan objectives. By including these three elements, you can make sure your plan doesn't just sit on a shelf.

Activating your Plan

Vermont law requires that all regulatory and non-regulatory tools chosen for implementation must conform to the municipal plan. That means the implementation steps must:

- Make progress toward attaining, or at least not interfere with, the goals and policies contained in the municipal plan;
- Provide for proposed future land uses, densities, and intensities of development contained in the municipal plan;
- Carry out, as applicable, any specific proposals for community facilities, or other proposed actions contained in the municipal plan (24 V.S.A. section 4401 and section 4303 (6)).



2.5.1.Types of Action Items

There are a wide variety of regulatory and non-regulatory tools described in the Planning Implementation Manual that can help municipalities put their plans into action. The list of Vermont-based examples of goals and objectives highlighted in Step 3 also includes relevant actions and implementation tools. We encourage you to use this list as you think of ideas, and reach out to other communities and learn from their experiences.

Regulatory Tools

Regulatory tools include permitting rules for any aspect of land development such as uses; the scale, density and height of buildings; signs; architectural detail; and the design of new streets and bike paths. There is no right answer as to how much or how little your community decides to regulate. Every community has its own particular needs, resources, and views on government, land, and community life.

Most municipalities adopt some form of land regulations (e.g., zoning ordinance or unified development bylaw) that involve identifying districts or zones, each of which have a different set of uses, dimensional requirements, and standards for development. The districts must be consistent with the land use plan you developed in Step 4, although they may be more specific.

Along with adopting zoning standards, municipalities may also enact other regulatory tools such as impact fees, official maps, and subdivision bylaws. Beyond that, municipalities can also adopt ordinances to set standards for roads and driveways, parking, sewer and water connections, and other public works matters that can help ensure new development meets local goals.

Vermont law places some limits on what kinds of land uses municipalities can regulate, and requires certain other provisions. For example, zoning bylaws must provide for equal treatment of multi-family housing, manufactured homes, mobile home parks, and affordable housing. (Towns cannot create unreasonable barriers to developing these housing types.) Municipalities are also prohibited from regulating state-defined agricultural and forestry practices; farm structures; and public utility power generating plants and transmission facilities. See statute for details on required provisions and prohibited effects, and bylaw limitations ([24 V.S.A. section 4412](#) and [24 V.S.A. section 4413](#)). While it's helpful to be aware of these restrictions, don't get bogged down in these details as you work on developing your regulatory implementation program.

Non-regulatory Tools

There are a wide variety of non-regulatory implementation tools, such as capital improvement programs, housing incentives, and open space funds to help communities implement their plan. Many of these tools have been broadly applied throughout Vermont and beyond, and are highlighted in the [Planning Implementation Manual](#). That said, don't



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feel limited by these examples. There are few restrictions on non-regulatory actions, so this is an opportunity to get creative and tailor solutions to your community's needs.

One of the best tools available to meet your community vision and objectives is capital planning: that is, how you use limited funds to achieve needed improvements in public facilities and infrastructure. Not all improvements can (or should) be funded right now; some may be more critical to meeting your planning goals than others. It's a powerful implementation tool to fund priority projects for infrastructure and public facilities (such as roads, water and wastewater facilities and town public works facilities and equipment) which are essential to fulfill the plan's goals and objectives.



2.5.2. How Does Capital Planning Align with Municipal Plans?

Municipal planning and capital planning are tightly linked, and should be considered as part of a larger process of responsible local governance. The municipal plan includes focused plans, such as the utility and facility plan, which identifies the capital priorities in other sections of the plan including transportation, educational facilities, economic development, and flood resilience. In turn, the capital plan represents a plan of action that shows exactly how the community intends to renew and modernize infrastructure and equipment, which enhances public service delivery as outlined in the municipal plan.

State statute authorizes municipalities with duly adopted municipal plans to adopt a “capital budget and program” ([24 V.S.A. § 4430](#)), which allows municipalities to prioritize capital expenditures over a specific period of time. Although it’s not legally binding, the capital plan should match capital projects and equipment purchases that are included in the annual budget, as approved by the Selectboard, and presented for approval by voters. The capital plan contains projects and equipment costs, and methods of financing, and prioritizes them for each of the next several (e.g., 5 or 8 or 10) years.

One of the most important purposes of the capital plan is to anticipate the needs of residents for public improvements, and provide a sensible strategy for meeting those needs. In general, long-term needs are determined by the municipal plan and the work of the planning commission in analyzing land-use and population trends with respect to the financial capacity of the community to provide services.

For example, the anticipated growth of the community is highly dependent on planning and zoning policies to accommodate future residential development. With this in mind, the capital plan builds on the municipal plan with a complete inventory of land, buildings, and equipment and puts forth a set of goals and actions to promote the sustainability of the assets and infrastructure with respect to the anticipated growth, and the need for modernization over time.

The capital plan then projects the costs to provide and maintain the facilities and services and “levels out” the peaks and valleys of capital costs over a multi-year period. Specifically, a primary objective of the capital plan is to reduce the need for loans that can cost a community hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt service over the long term. A good capital plan allows the municipality to update infrastructure and replace equipment on a realistic schedule, which may reduce costly repairs.

The following are two examples of how capital planning and budgeting are essential to the effective implementation of policies in your plan:

- Any sewer line extensions through the public works department should adhere to land use policies on desired locations for growth. Extending sewer lines beyond existing growth centers often leads to commercial and residential sprawl, and should be discouraged.



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- If there are plans to replace aging infrastructure and add streetscape improvements like sidewalks, try to schedule them together to minimize disruption, and reduce costs. Bridge replacements and road rebuilding projects that drag on for months or years may squeeze nearby small businesses out of existence, as customers avoid these areas during construction.

Coordinating public and private actions can be another effective way of insuring that your vision and objectives are carried out. Your plan's implementation program should spell out how this coordination will take place. For example, a municipal decision to upgrade roads should be consistent with any plans for future growth. If a large private housing or commercial development would increase traffic congestion, it's appropriate for the municipality to require the developer to fund required road improvements and traffic controls nearby and at the entrance to those projects, as a condition of approval.

Partnering with other stakeholders:

The private sector and nonprofits may engage in a variety of development and conservation activities, including building homes, businesses, and industrial facilities, and the permanent protection of lands for recreation and agriculture. Partnerships between the public and these entities can bring together the talents and resources to develop innovative solutions to common problems. It's worth reaching out to these stakeholders in each phase of the planning and implementation process, so they can bring additional ideas and resources to the table to activate your plan.

Your community may also pursue cooperation with property owners in the private sector whose lands are sited in key locations, or whose plans may have a significant impact on the community, in ways that can support or detract from the plan. Contact these individuals early to learn their intentions, and to inform them about the process and vision if they haven't been involved yet. Work with them to identify mutually beneficial implementation strategies. By working together in a cooperative atmosphere, public and private entities can avoid adversarial relationships, and developments that contradict the vision, goals and objectives in your municipal plan.

Examples of individuals in this category include:

- Owners of significant resource lands, such as farmland and scenic areas;
- Major employers;
- Owners of major recreation facilities, such as a ski area;
- Landowners in an area targeted for new development;
- Developers active in the community.

Communities may also wish to coordinate their implementation programs with nonprofit groups working in areas such as affordable housing, land conservation, or economic development. For economic development, most parts of Vermont are served by regional development corporations (RDCs). They exist to assist private sector businesses expand



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current facilities, access training programs for employees, access financing for business expansion, or find locations for stores, plants, or warehouses. They can also help communities set up economic development programs, and take other steps to encourage the kind of economic development that meets local goals. Local chambers of commerce and downtown organizations can also be helpful in this area.



2.5.3. Evaluating Alternatives and Identifying Priorities

Evaluating the strategies you identified to meet a particular objective will help you arrive at recommended priorities for implementation. Consider the following criteria:

- The availability of financial resources required for implementation
- The capacity of municipal staff or volunteers to do the work
- The timing of the action, given other priorities in the community
- The compatibility of the action with other proposed actions
- The degree of alignment between the action and community values and sentiments
- The effectiveness of the action in meeting the shared community vision and public goals

If you have a large number of action items, consider using an initial screening process to quickly evaluate all of the action items to identify the ones that merit more in-depth consideration and inclusion in your implementation plan.

A successful implementation program has community buy-in; responsible parties are identified for every implementation action. Make sure your process is as transparent as possible, demonstrating how the proposed actions implement the shared community vision developed in Step 2.

Once you have a draft of your implementation program, invite all of those who participated in earlier planning steps to a community meeting, and post it on the town website, so you can present the progress on the plan and give them a chance to comment on the proposals. Implementation can't happen without them, and if they aren't on board, you risk setting up the plan and community vision for failure. As with the other steps described in Step 2, there are a variety of ways you can involve the public at this stage, and you should select the method that best fits your community. Getting widespread community input also helps identify the best alternatives and priorities when there are competing ideas that both make sense on paper.



2.5.4. Moving from Plan to Action

Now that you have your community vision, your goals and objectives, and your action items laid out, it's time to begin moving from plan to implementation, starting with the formal adoption process. The adoption process is clearly described in Appendix 1 of this module. There are checklists and instructions to help you along the way.

The required adoption process includes formal public hearings that may result in changes to a document over which you have labored long and hard. However, if in the process of developing the plan, there has been broad and open public discussion of the vision and implementation priorities, the changes usually will be minimal.

If you've completed Steps 1 through 5 congratulations! It's time to move toward achieving your community vision. The Planning Implementation Manual can help you focus on those implementation strategies.

2.5.5. Municipal Plan Implementation Strategies (Example)

Municipal Plan Element: **Land Use**

Objective/Measurable Target: The majority of new development and subdivision occurs in the village and surrounding districts.

Action/Strategy	Area	Recommended Lead/Partner	Estimated Cost	Timing	Priority	Financing
Hold public meetings on land conservation options and follow up with individual meetings with key landowners	Agriculture and Conservation Districts	Conservation Commission with assistance from Land Trust	Low (meeting and outreach expenses)	2 years	High	Conservation Commission Fund
Update bylaw to maintain historic character of the village and neighborhoods and enable infill in keeping with revitalization goals.	Village Districts	Planning Commission	\$20,0000 (consultant and public outreach)	2 years	High	Municipal Planning Grant and Town Planning Fund
Adopt sewer and water service ordinance, addressing hook-ups and line extensions	Village Districts	Selectboard with Planning Commission	\$5,000	2 years	High	General Fund and technical assistance from Rural Water Association
Conduct a village planning process and produce an illustrative master plan of the desired development pattern to guide future decisions.	Village Districts	Planning Commission with Selectboard and Village Revitalization Committee	\$75,000	3-5 years	Medium	Better Connections Grant and Town Planning Fund



West Windsor; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Chapter 3. Working with Existing Municipal Plans

Developing or rewriting a municipal plan is a major undertaking for a community. Once adopted, communities often set it aside to focus on implementation. However, the plan is meant to be a living document, used regularly to guide decisions and track progress.

In Vermont, towns must update and readopt their plans every eight years to keep them valid. If a plan expires, existing bylaws and capital plans remain in effect but can't be amended until the plan is renewed. An expired plan also can't be used in local or state regulatory reviews. In addition, the regional planning commission can't approve the plan or confirm local planning efforts—both required to access many state grants, designation programs, and to levy impact fees.

With new planning requirements, public engagement methods, and evolving tools, many commissions struggle to keep plans current while acting on their goals. To ease this, in 2015 the legislature extended the plan cycle from five to eight years, giving communities more time for implementation. This section outlines strategies and best practices for reviewing, amending, and fully updating a plan, as well as tips for organizing it to simplify future updates and reporting.



3.1. Make Use of Existing Plans

Creating a municipal plan takes significant effort, so it should be kept visible and used often—not filed away and forgotten. When treated as a working document, plans can guide local decisions on work programs and budgets, reviewing proposed development, establishing new programs, and undertaking community projects. Functional plans are clear, well organized, and structured for easy reference and use. Plans that include targets, indicators, or benchmarks can be used to track trends and measure progress. Regularly using the plan also makes it easier to spot when updates are needed.

Plan and Bylaw Database

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) keeps a [searchable database of municipal plans](#) and bylaws that have been submitted to them. Ask your regional planning commission staff if there are other towns which have addressed similar planning challenges as your community, which can be found with this tool. It's often helpful to review how other towns have approached and resolved the same issues faced by your town, or structured their plans for action.

Tips to Make Your Plan User-Friendly:

- Clearly state the community vision, goals, and priorities at the beginning of the plan to ensure visibility.
- Use a summary table or to-do list to show priority actions, responsible parties, and timelines—helping volunteers quickly identify tasks.
- Set benchmarks to track trends and measure progress using indicators aligned with community goals.
- Place background data in a separate fact book or appendix (see Step 1) to keep the plan focused on the future
- Use charts, tables, or sidebars to present key data and concepts, making them easier to update and share, especially on social media.
- Consolidate and number policies and recommendations in a dedicated section for easy citation.
- Keep the plan concise by removing unnecessary content—volunteers are more likely to read a shorter, focused document.
- Publish the plan as a single, searchable PDF on the municipal website with a hyperlinked table of contents and cross-references.



3.2. Annual Review and Status Updates

Ideally, the planning commission would regularly set aside time to review parts of the municipal plan and identify opportunities for progress. For example, if the plan recommends pedestrian infrastructure, and a new development is proposed where sidewalks are desired and appropriate, the commission could reach out to the developer to promote their addition. Or if grant funding becomes available for hazard mitigation, the commission could revisit the flood resilience section of the plan and pursue funding for specific projects, like upgrading culverts.

An annual, more comprehensive review of progress toward plan goals and objectives is essential. This can align with the planning commission's annual reporting (see [Appendix 1](#)), often included in the municipality's annual report and used to support budget requests for the coming year. The review should involve local elected officials, such as the Selectboard or City Council, to keep them informed, update ordinances as needed, and gain support for investments in staff, studies, infrastructure, and other implementation efforts.

An annual review could include:

- A review and statistical summary of recent development activity in town, in relation to the plan's goals for growth. Do recent developments conform to (or deviate from) your plan goals, policies, objectives, and projected rates of growth?
- The status of implementation actions or programs. Have there been any major accomplishments or new initiatives within the past year? Have any barriers been encountered?
- The identification of new or emerging issues for future consideration. Have issues come up that aren't adequately addressed in the current municipal plan or related bylaws? Are there new state planning requirements that will have to be met?

Reviewing local programs, development activity, and plan goals and objectives each year helps keep the plan relevant and useful for local government. The annual review is also a good time to identify possible amendments for the next year or to flag bigger updates for the future.

For regional confirmation of the municipal planning process (see [RPC role in Appendix 1](#)), a municipality must show that it's actively implementing the plan. Routine annual reviews, including progress updates, will support this confirmation, and help maintain access to grants and other related benefits.



3.3. Plan Amendments and Readoptions

A municipal plan can be updated as part of the eight-year plan re adoption, or at any time, using the plan amendment process. The plan re adoption process extends the life of the plan (the expiration date), while the plan amendment process does not.

Plan amendments are a focused update of one or more sections of the plan — by topic (e.g., plan element, issue, or concern) or by planning area (e.g., to revise boundaries or policy for a specific neighborhood or zoning district). Both updates and amendments need to follow the same adoption process. (24 V.S.A. section [4385](#) and [4387](#)).

The amendment process can be used to update a section of the plan, to add new sections or policies, to incorporate supporting plans and information, and to address new statutory requirements. Plan amendments are most often made in response to proposed rezoning, to ensure that zoning changes are consistent with the land use plan and map.

A plan amendment can be prepared by the planning commission, or a “person or body” other than the planning commission, for their consideration ([24 V.S.A. 4384](#)). When considering a plan amendment, the planning commission must prepare a written report that addresses the extent to which the proposed amendment conforms to relevant [state planning goals](#). If the proposed amendment would alter “the land designation of any land area” (for example a zoning reclassification), the report must also include written findings with regard to:

- The probable impact of the proposal on the surrounding area, including the effect of any increase in traffic, and the overall pattern of land use;
- The long-term cost and benefit to the municipality, with regard to probable impacts to the municipal tax base and the need for public facilities;
- The amount of vacant land available (e.g., already zoned or designated), needed and proposed for the intended use or purpose;
- The suitability of the area in question for the intended use or purpose, with consideration given to appropriate alternative locations, alternative uses for the area under consideration, and the probable impact of the proposed change on other, similarly designated areas;
- Whether the size and boundaries of the proposed area are appropriate with respect to the area required for the proposed use, the capability of the land to support it, and existing development in the area.

While this may seem like a routine administrative requirement, it is important to take the written report seriously, and develop findings and conclusions for each proposed amendment. The Vermont Superior Court’s Civil Division has ruled plan amendments to be invalid when these reporting requirements have not been met (*Hawk Rock Holdings, LLC v. Town of Newark*, 2015).



Amendments proposed by other parties

Persons or bodies other than the planning commission may propose amendments to the plan. The planning commission may decide whether to hold a hearing on an amendment and may make changes to the amendment. However, if the amendment is supported by a petition signed by five percent or more of the registered voters the planning commission must proceed promptly to hold a hearing on the amendment, prepare a report on the amendment, distribute copies of the amendment, and submit the amendment to the legislative body in accordance with Chapter 117. The planning commission may not alter an amendment supported by five percent or more of the registered voters except to correct technical deficiencies, such as, grammar, spelling and punctuation. The legislative body is also required hold a hearing on such an amendment, but is under no obligation to adopt the amendment (24 V.S.A. section 4384 and section 4385).



3.4. Review Before the Plan Expires

As you approach the eight-year expiration date of your current municipal plan, it's good practice to conduct a comprehensive review or "audit" of the plan to determine whether it remains current. In Vermont, the planning commission must update the plan's underlying information before readopting it. An in-depth review well in advance of the expiration date helps determine whether the plan needs minor edits, specific amendments, or a full update and rewrite.

The level of effort required for the update will depend on:

- The planning horizon and projections used to develop the current plan;
- The rate of growth and development within the community since the plan was last adopted;
- The extent of past and recent community engagement in the planning process;
- The degree to which the plan, and supporting information, data, and maps were updated the last time around;
- The degree to which the plan meets statutory requirements.
- The extent to which the plan has been amended since it was last adopted.

Barring a major event or other significant changes, a plan that previously underwent a comprehensive update, has a 20-year planning horizon, and was amended as needed will likely remain relevant at the eight-year mark, and will require only minor updates before re adoption. At this stage, the planning commission should focus on the progress of the plan's action implementation program, which should be well underway.

RPC Consultations

RPCs schedule municipal consultations or "check-ins" every two to three years, so they can better understand the needs of your community. The RPC takes this opportunity to review your plan to ensure that it meets statutory goals and requirements, typically offering suggestions for ways to make it better. Once the plan is adopted, the RPC will periodically review your implementation efforts. Consultations provide a terrific opportunity for the municipality to discuss the implementation program, any anticipated plan updates, identify planning and training needs, and learn more about assistance programs and funding opportunities.

A more formal review process is recommended for plans that have not been updated in a while — one that involves the legislative body and regional planning commission — since both will be reviewing the plan prior to its re adoption. The planning commission should document its findings and conclusions about whether to make minor updates, strategic amendments, or a comprehensive rewrite.



Key considerations include:

- The status of underlying assumptions, planning time frames (short, medium and long term), and projections (e.g., population, employment, development) in relation to observed rates of growth and development;
- The availability of new or more accurate data, information, and maps, including supporting plans, studies, or reports completed since the plan was last updated;
- Major events or developments locally, or in neighboring communities, that have impacted the community, or may affect long-term planning goals and objectives;
- The status of plan goals and objectives. (Are these still relevant, representative of the elected leadership and public opinion, and do they continue to provide adequate guidance?);
- The status of the plan's recommended implementation program, including specific action items;
- The extent to which recent development and infrastructure improvements have been consistent with, or deviated from, plan goals, policies, and objectives;
- Changes in the status or capacity of community services, facilities and infrastructure, and supporting revenue sources;
- The timing of planned infrastructure improvements in relation to observed rates of development;
- New or recurring issues and forms of development that are not addressed in the current plan or bylaws;
- Land use, service area, or zoning changes needed to accommodate new or expanded development;
- Changes in enabling legislation, statutory requirements, or state policies and programs that affect the local plan or planning process;
- Recommendations from the regional planning commission with regard to needed plan updates or amendments; and
- Recent legal cases that require changes to the plan, planning process, or implementing bylaws and ordinances.

If the planning commission finds only certain parts of the plan or implementation program outdated, a targeted update or amendment may suffice. If the plan no longer reflects the community's needs, a full rewrite or new plan might be necessary. In either case, the commission should present its findings and specific update recommendations to the legislative body. This presentation should include a proposed schedule for updating, public hearings, adoption, and requests for any needed funding or technical support.



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Celebrate!

Local volunteers, working with consultants and planning staff, analyze data, create visions, engage the community, develop plans, and implement them. This work can be challenging and often thankless but is vital to our state's future.

Municipal plans guide development, protect key community assets and sensitive environmental features, and direct infrastructure growth. They signal to developers where to build and to conservation groups where to focus. Plans reflect a community's history and map its future. They help promote community health so that environmental benefits and responsibilities are shared fairly. In this way, municipal plans shape the landscape and influence Vermont's future for generations.

You're not alone in this important work. State agencies, regional commissions, and neighboring towns offer support, guidance, and best practices. Your dedication is crucial to Vermont's economy and community. ***Thank you for your time and effort!***



Northfield; Image Credit: DuBois & King



East Burke; Image Credit: SE Group

Appendix 1: Guidance and Information

Familiarity with the history and structure of the laws that govern the planning process can help Planning Commissions navigate the process most effectively. This Appendix summarizes the relevant provisions of Vermont's Planning and Development Act and related statutes. It is intended to guide planning commissioners and others through the legal and technical requirements of developing, adopting, and updating a municipal plan.



A1.1. Legal Framework

Vermont's legal framework for planning is established in the **Vermont Planning and Development Act**, which is codified in [24 V.S.A. chapter 117](#) and commonly referred to as "Chapter 117." The planning process is also influenced by [10 V.S.A. chapter 151](#), known as **Act 250**, which regulates land use and development projects, and by the **Certificate of Public Good** process for state approval of gas line, electric generation and telecommunication facilities by the Vermont Public Utility Commission, commonly referred to as "Section 248" ([30 V.S.A. section 248](#)). These statutes are all available [online](#), and in hard copy at many public libraries and town offices.

A1.1.1. Chapter 117

Chapter 117, authorized the establishment of municipal and regional planning commissions, and sets forth general purposes to guide them. In 1988 the legislature adopted Act 200, Vermont's Growth Management Act. This amendment to Chapter 117 laid out specific state land use goals, sought broader public participation in the planning process, and better coordination among neighboring municipalities and across regions.

Chapter 117 provides a framework and procedures for municipalities to establish municipal planning commissions and sets forth the terms, method of appointment, powers, and duties of commissioners. It specifies the process to develop, review, and adopt municipal plans, and includes guidelines and requirements for the content of plans and plan amendments. Communities that have prepared and adopted plans are authorized to adopt zoning bylaws (permitting rules) that conform with the plans. Chapter 117 spells out precise procedures for bylaw adoption, administration, and enforcement.

Foundation for Municipal Regulations and Programs

To adopt or amend zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, an official map, a capital budget and program, and impact fees, Vermont municipalities must have in effect a municipal plan. According to Vermont law, plans are the basis for bylaws and bylaws must be consistent with the plan and must have the purpose of implementing the plan ([24 V.S.A. section 4401\(a\)](#)).

Because of this requirement, it is important that the plan contain a good foundation for the specific provisions the municipality wants to include in its zoning bylaws. The data in the plan, the analysis of the issues, and the plan goals, objectives, and policies must provide a clear and logical basis for regulatory steps the community will take. For a community to adopt a capital budget and program, the utilities and facilities element of the plan must describe current facilities, expected needs, and recommendations for meeting future needs ([24 V.S.A. section 4404a](#)).

If a municipality does not have a solid basis in its plan for the regulations it puts into effect, the regulations can be challenged in court. The municipality must be able to



demonstrate how its actions relate to an integrated, coordinated, and coherent plan for the community's future.

A1.1.2. Act 250

Vermont's Land Use and Development Law, commonly known as Act 250 and administered by the Land Use Review Board, requires that certain types of development obtain a state land use permit before starting construction. For example, subdivisions of 10 lots or more, commercial development on more than one acre in towns that don't have permanent zoning and subdivision regulations, or on more than 10 acres in towns that do, and any development above 2,500 feet elevation, must apply for and receive an Act 250 permit. These long-standing jurisdictional thresholds are transitioning to a system of location-based tiered jurisdiction under Act 181 of 2024. [Interim exemptions](#) apply during the transition (through 2027). Municipalities may opt-in or apply to the State's Land Use Review Board to have qualifying areas become fully or partially exempt. Many downtown and village centers and their neighborhoods throughout the state are eligible to apply for exemption of certain areas and municipalities will have to demonstrate capacity to apply and enforce permitting requirements. More information about this new structure can be found [here](#). To obtain a permit or learn more about interim exemptions and tiered jurisdiction developers or landowners may contact the regional planning commission or district environmental commission for that region.

Projects that need an Act 250 permit must satisfy [10 criteria](#). These include the impacts that the development is expected to have on air and water quality, water supply, traffic, educational and municipal services, and historic and natural resources, including scenic beauty and necessary wildlife habitat. One of the criteria requires that the project conform to any applicable local or regional land use plan or capital plan. Appendix 2 of this module details how plans are considered in the Act 250 review process.

The [District Environmental Commission](#) reviews each application and either grants a permit, typically with conditions, or denies it. The Commission may make specific findings of fact and conclusions of law that justify and explain its decision in detail. The parties to an Act 250 hearing include the applicant, the municipal legislative body and its planning commission, the regional planning commission, and affected state agencies. The Commission may also grant party status to adjoining property owners, and to other persons or groups who may be affected by the proposed project.

A1.1.3. Section 248

Vermont requires approval from the [Public Utility Commission](#) (PUC) before beginning work on any electric transmission or generation facilities and certain gas pipelines. This approval is known as a certificate of public good. In addition to considering certain criteria that relate specifically to energy issues, the PUC considers whether the proposed project would have an undue adverse effect on aesthetics, historic sites, air and water



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purity, the natural environment, the use of natural resources, and public health and safety. These considerations are made with explicit reference to the Act 250 criteria.

Like the District Environmental Commissions in Act 250 proceedings, the PUC reviews each application and either grants a certificate of public good, typically with conditions, or denies it. Neither municipalities nor planning commissions are automatically granted party status in PSB dockets, but they may request to intervene in any proceeding in which they have a particular interest. They can also request that they be added to the PSB's e-mailing list as an interested party without formally intervening. Appendix 2 of this module details how municipal plans are considered in the PSB review process.



A1.2. Key Planning Roles

A1.2.1. State of Vermont

Vermont is a 'Dillon's Rule' state. With respect to land use planning, the State of Vermont establishes the authority for local and regional planning, and sets forth the legal framework for planning policies and municipal permitting. The State also undertakes its own planning for state capital investments, transportation, housing, social services, economic development, and environmental protection. These actions can have a significant impact on municipal plans and budgets.

The Legislature also adopts laws that affect local and regional planning. Act 250 (the State Land Use and Development Law), environmental protection laws, and authorizations for grant and loan programs are examples of legislation that affect municipal planning. These statutes include standards, policies, and guidelines that affected or participating municipalities must follow.

The executive branch of the state government proposes the capital budget for state investments, which is ultimately decided by the legislature. These investments—including road improvements, municipal water pollution control and water supply facilities, local and state recreation land acquisition and development, and government buildings, such as courthouses, administrative offices and jails—affect both the way municipalities grow, and the nature and pattern of their development.

Under Chapter 117, the [Department of Housing and Community Development](#) (DHCD) periodically reviews the planning process of municipalities that don't have approved plans, for the purposes of evaluating whether the municipality is complying with its obligations regarding affordable housing ([24 V.S.A. 4351](#)). DHCD also provides funding and support to municipalities that are engaged in planning through its Municipal Planning Grant Program, which is funded by revenue from the property transfer tax.

A1.2.2. Regional Planning Commissions

There are 11 [regional planning commissions](#) (RPCs) in Vermont. The powers and duties of RPCs include but are not limited to:

- Preparing regional plans and amending them when necessary;
- Promoting intermunicipal cooperation and coordinated development;
- Providing technical assistance to help municipalities prepare and maintain municipal plans, studies, bylaws, and other implementation activities;



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- Preparing studies and recommendations on land development, hazard mitigation, brownfield mitigation, transportation, scenic preservation, and conservation of energy; and
- Implementing programs in cooperation with municipalities for appropriate development, improvement, protection and preservation of the region's physical and human resources.

RPCs help municipalities plan by providing data and maps; suggesting planning goals, objectives, and policies; proposing techniques for implementing plans; supporting local program development and administration; and developing and disseminating information on regional trends, development patterns, and issues.

RPCs also play a critical role in the municipal planning process. RPCs are required to review the planning process of its member municipalities at least twice during an eight-year period, or more frequently on request of the municipality. As part of the consultation, the RPC confirms if the municipality's process complies with the criteria listed in [24 V.S.A. 4350](#), which require that a municipality is (1) engaged in a continuing planning process that is consistent with state planning goals; (2) engaged in a process to implement its municipal plan consistent with [24 V.S.A. 4382](#); and (3) maintaining its commitment to provide local funds for municipal and regional planning purposes.

For municipalities to obtain and retain regional confirmation of their municipal plan, they must request RPC review and approval. Approval is granted if the plan:

- Is consistent with the [state planning goals](#)
- Is compatible with the adopted regional plan
- Is compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the region; and
- Contains all plan elements required in [24 V.S.A. 4382](#).

Once a municipal plan is approved by the RPC, the next consultation will focus on assessing whether a municipality is actively engaging in implementing its plan including:

- preparing and adopting zoning bylaws and amendments;
- capital budgets and programs;
- supplemental plans;
- other actions, programs or measures.

A confirmed planning process makes a municipality eligible to apply for Municipal Planning Grants, other state grants, the state designation programs and to levy impact fees, if it has adopted a capital budget.



A1.2.3. Municipalities

Any municipality may undertake a comprehensive planning program including related preliminary planning and engineering studies. They can prepare, maintain, and implement a plan within its jurisdiction. However, unlike regional planning commissions, municipalities are not required to have an approved plan.

In addition to undertaking local planning activities, and regardless of whether the municipality has an approved plan of its own, municipalities can participate in regional and state planning programs. As members of the regional planning commission, municipal representatives participate in their decisions, including the adoption of the regional plan. Through their legislative bodies and planning commissions, municipalities may also request 'party status' in the review of applications under Act 250. This confers the right to participate in Act 250 proceedings, including the right to appeal unfavorable decisions.



A1.3. Preparation and Adoption of the Plan

A1.3.1. Adoption Procedures for Planning Commissions and Selectboards

Responsibilities of the Planning Commission:

The Importance of Proper Adoption Procedures

If the plan is to remain in effect and withstand legal challenges, the municipality must follow the adoption procedures for the plan set forth in Chapter 117. Plans have been invalidated by courts because municipalities have failed to follow these procedures. To avoid such challenges, municipalities should carefully review the provisions of [24 V.S.A. 4384](#), [24 V.S.A. 4385](#), and [24 V.S.A. 4387](#). Municipalities should utilize the municipal clerk's [certification of adoption or amendment](#), and record the steps taken. A good record of adoption actions, including careful minutes of resolutions adopted and actions taken, will minimize the threat of legal challenges.

The planning commission is responsible for preparing the plan, distributing the plan, holding public hearings on the plan, and submitting it to the municipality's legislative body for consideration. (The legislative body refers to the selectboard, Board of Aldermen, City Council, or the equivalent.) The planning commission must comment or prepare a report on any changes proposed by the legislative body. The planning commission must follow the specific requirements for preparation of the plan set forth in [24 V.S.A. 4384](#).

These requirements include soliciting the participation of local citizens and organizations by holding informal working sessions that suit the needs of local people.

The planning commission must hold at least one public hearing regarding the proposed plan or amendment. At least 30 days before the public hearing, a copy of the proposed plan or amendment must be delivered to the chairpersons of the planning commissions of each abutting municipality (or to the clerk of those municipalities if they do not have planning commissions), to the applicable regional planning commission, to the state Department of Housing and Community Development, and to any community groups or organizations that requested a copy.

Adoption of a municipal plan for a community with 2,500 people or fewer will take at least 60 days, assuming there are no changes proposed to the plan during the adoption process, and the legislative body is able to adopt the plan immediately following their hearing. In a larger community, the legislative body has to have a second hearing, so the entire adoption process -- even if there are no changes to the plan. If a change does get proposed during the adoption process, your community will have to warn another hearing



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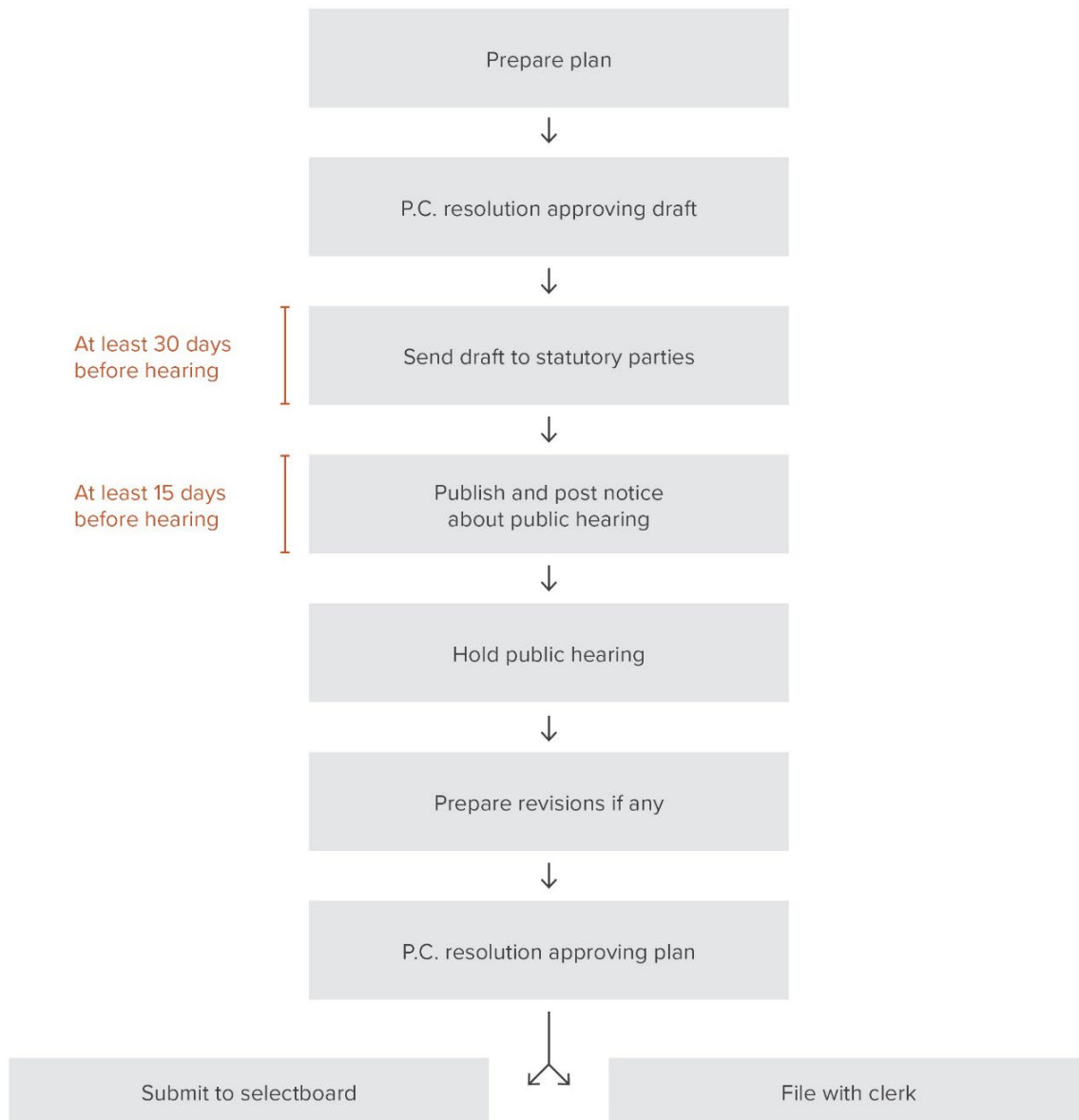
with 15 days' notice. If your community has voted to adopt municipal plans by Australian ballot, the process will take even longer.

Hearings are not the same as regular meetings, although they can be held on the same date. The purpose of a hearing is to hear comment on a specific subject, such as a proposed plan amendment. The board holding the hearing does not take any action in the hearing. **The decision to amend a proposed plan or accept it as presented must be made at a subsequent, duly noticed meeting, after the hearing has closed.**

When warning a hearing, count 15 days back from the day prior to the hearing to correctly warn it. For example, a hearing on July 29th would need to be warned no later than July 14th.



Responsibilities of the Planning Commission Flowchart





Responsibility of the Legislative Body

Chapter 117 spells out the official role of the legislative body in developing and adopting the plan. According to the statute, the legislative body is responsible for reviewing the plan, holding public hearings on the plan, and adopting the plan. The legislative body may make changes to the plan in accordance with provisions of [24 V.S.A. 4385](#).

More specifically, the legislative body is required to hold at least one public hearing between 30 and 120 days after receiving a proposed plan or amendment. Towns with more than 2,500 people must hold a second hearing. The legislative body may change the proposed plan or amendment, but any changes must be made at least 15 days before the last public hearing. A copy of the changed proposal must be provided to the town clerk, to anyone who has requested a copy in writing, and to the planning commission. The planning commission should analyze the change to evaluate whether the proposal is still consistent with the state's land use goals.

After the public hearing requirements have been satisfied, the legislative body may adopt the proposed plan or amendment by majority vote. Alternatively, the voters of the municipality may vote by Australian ballot at a meeting that has been properly warned in accord with 17 V.S.A. Chapter 55. In order for adoption by Australian ballot to be effective, the selectboard and planning commission should take some precaution. Particular care must be made to include the public throughout the planning process so that the voters are informed of all the issues and impacts of the plan. This is a two-step process. First, the voters must choose to use this method of adoption, and then they must vote whether or not to adopt the plan or amendment.

Adoption of a Regional Plan by Municipality

[Chapter 117](#) enables a municipality to adopt a regional plan or a portion of a regional plan as its municipal plan.

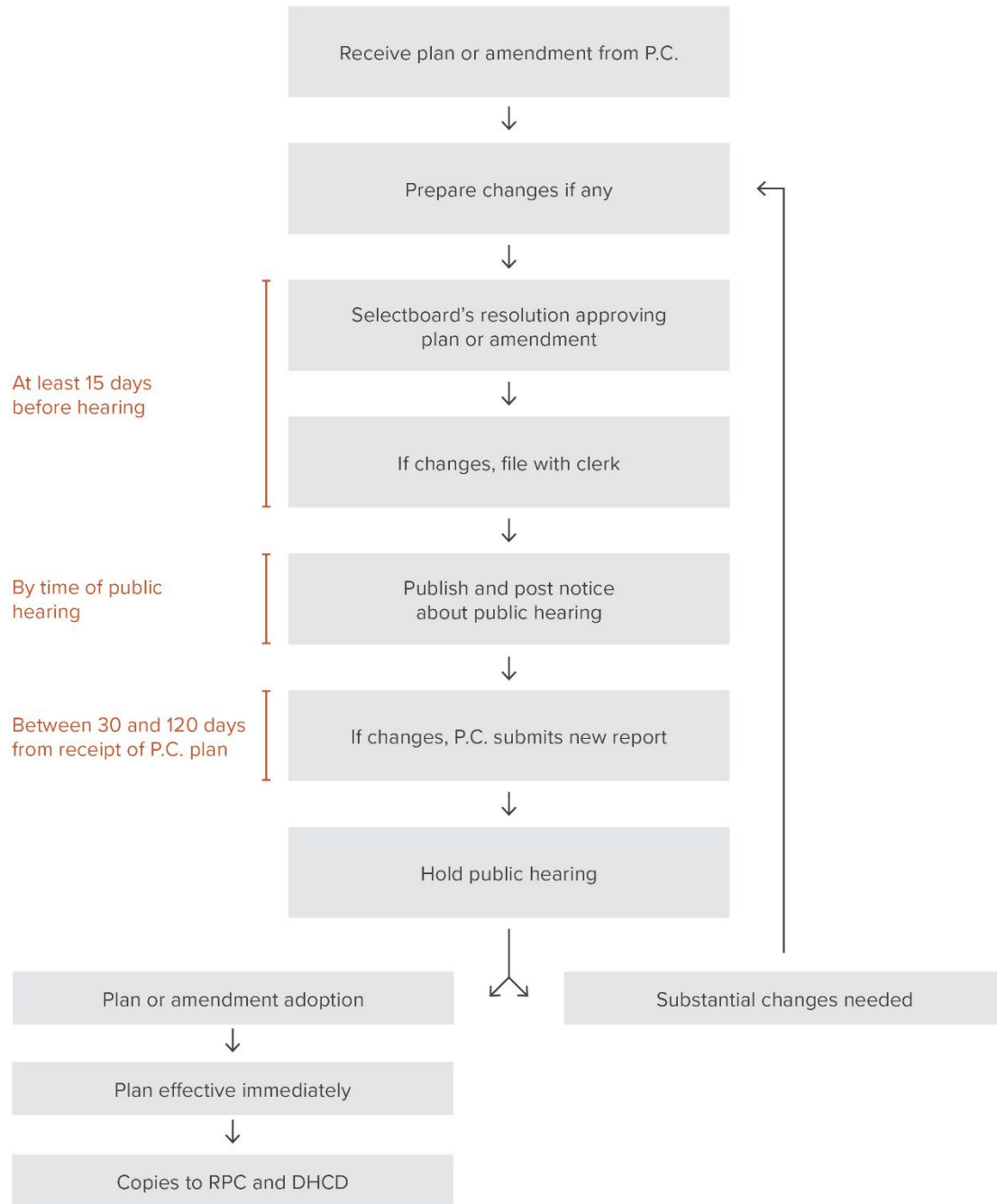
The regional plan must have been prepared and adopted by the regional planning commission before it can be adopted by a municipality. The adoption procedures are the same as for a plan prepared by a local planning commission ([24 V.S.A. 4349](#)).

Effective Date

The plan becomes effective immediately upon adoption by the legislative body or voters ([24 V.S.A. 4385](#)). After the adoption of a plan or amendment it is good practice to have the municipal clerk prepare a certificate describing the publication, posting, consideration, and adoption. The certificate can be used as evidence that the municipality complied with these requirements ([24 V.S.A. 4447](#)).



Responsibilities of the Legislative Body Flowchart





A1.3.2. Regional Approval of the Municipal Plan

A municipality may choose to have its plan reviewed by the regional planning commission for consistency with the statewide goals and compatibility with the regional plan and approved municipal plans within the region. If so, the municipality submits the plan to the regional planning commission after the last hearing by the legislative body, either before or after it is adopted. Regional approval is NOT required, but there are certain benefits a municipality can receive if that happens. A municipality must have an approved plan to receive confirmation of the planning process. Regional confirmation is required for a municipality to receive state planning funds, or levy impact fees on new development ([24 V.S.A. 4350](#)).

The law spells out the criteria under which the regional planning commission will conduct the review. To be approved, a municipal plan must be *consistent* with the [state's land use goals](#), *compatible* with the regional plan and with approved plans of other municipalities in the region, and it must contain all of the [required elements](#). The law requires that the regional planning commission make its decision on approval within two months of receipt of the plan following the municipality's last public hearing.

If the plan is disapproved, the municipality's legislative body has two choices:

1. They can modify the plan, based on recommendations, and resubmit it to the regional planning commission for review. OR
2. They can ignore the decision and adopt the plan anyway, if not already adopted.

An adopted plan that has not been approved by the regional planning commission is still a valid plan. It can be used as a basis for bylaw development or amendment; it can be used to guide municipal decisions; and it has standing in Act 250 and Section 248 hearings unless the project has significant regional impact. If a municipality's plan is not approved, the municipality may not levy impact fees on new development within its borders under [24 V.S.A. 5203](#), and it is not eligible to receive municipal planning grants (except for grants to develop an approved plan) or grants from the Vermont community development program.

Act 181 brings new emphasis to the review of local plans for their alignment with regional plans, as well as new categories used in regional future land use maps. However, the process will be the largely same: Plans will be reviewed to determine whether they are consistent with the state's planning goals, and whether the municipal plan is compatible with the regional plan and approved plans of other municipalities in the region ([24 VSA 4350](#)). According to statute, "for one plan to be "compatible with" another, the plan in question, as implemented, will not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other plan." If the plan will reduce the desired effect of the other plan, municipalities have an opportunity to describe why this is necessary and how they might mitigate any negative effects.



A1.4. Municipal Plans: Required Elements

From [24 V.S.A. § 4382](#): *The plan for a municipality*

A plan for a municipality may be consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title and compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the region and with the regional plan. A municipal plan must include all the following:

1. A statement of objectives, policies, and programs of the municipality to guide the future growth and development of land, public services, and facilities, and to protect the environment;
2. A land use plan consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses that:
 - a. indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural land identification process described in 6 V.S.A. § 8), residence, commerce industry, public, and semi-public uses, and open spaces, areas reserved for flood plain, and areas identified by the State, the regional planning commission, or the municipality that require special consideration for aquifer protections, for wetland protection, for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors, or form other conservation purposes.
 - b. sets forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity, and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and service.
 - c. identifies those areas, if any, proposed for state designation under chapter 76A of this title, together with, for each area proposed for state designation, an explanation of how the state designation would further the plan's goals and the goals of section 4302 of this title, and how the area meets the requirements for the type of designation to be sought.
 - d. indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests. A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the municipality.
3. A transportation plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads, and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need;



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4. A utility and facility plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services, with indications of priority of need, costs and method of financing;
5. A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources;
6. An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system;
7. A recommended program for the implementation of the objectives of the development plan;
8. A statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region developed under this title;
9. An energy plan, including an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs, such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy;
10. A housing element that shall include a recommended program for addressing low and moderate income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission pursuant to subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title. The program should account for permitted accessory dwelling units, as defined in subdivision 4412(1)(E) of this title, which provide affordable housing;
11. An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth;
12. A flood resilience plan that:
 - a. identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; and
 - b. recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated under subdivision (12)(A)(i) of this subsection and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.
 - c. A flood resilience plan may reference an existing local hazard mitigation plan approved under 44C.F.R. § 201.6.



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The maps called for by this section may be combined into one or more maps, and may be referred to in each separate statement called for by this section.

Where appropriate, and to further the purposes of subsection 4302(b) of Title 24 of the Vermont Statutes, a municipal plan shall be based upon inventories, studies, and analyses of current trends and shall consider the probable social and economic consequences of the proposed plan. Such studies may consider or contain, but not be limited to:

1. Population characteristics and distribution, including income and employment;
2. The existing and projected housing needs by amount, type, and location for all economic groups within the municipality and the region;
3. Existing and estimated patterns and rates of growth in the various land use classifications, and desired patterns and rates of growth in terms of the community's ability to finance and provide public facilities and services.

Where appropriate, a municipal plan may provide for the use of "transit passes" or other evidence of reduced demand for parking spaces in lieu of parking spaces.



A1.5. State Planning Goals

From [24 VSA § 4302](#): *Purpose; goals*

Municipal plans should further the following specific goals:

- To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.
 - a. Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.
 - b. Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both, and should be encouraged in growth centers designated under chapter 76A of this title.
 - c. Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.
 - d. Development should be undertaken in accordance with smart growth principles as defined in subdivision 2791(13) of this title
- To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.
- To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.
- To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.
 - a. Highways, air, rail, and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced, and integrated.
- To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:
 - a. significant natural and fragile areas;
 - b. outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
 - c. significant scenic roads, waterways, and views;
 - d. important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites, and archaeologically sensitive areas.
- To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources.



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- a. Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).
 - b. Vermont's water quality should be maintained and improved according to the policies and actions developed in the basin plans established by the Secretary of Natural Resources under 10 V.S.A. § 1253.
 - c. Vermont's forestlands should be managed so as to maintain and improve forest blocks and habitat connectors.
- To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.
 - a. Specific strategies and recommendations for achieving these goals are identified in the State energy plans prepared under 30 V.S.A. §§ 202 and 202b.
 - b. General strategies for achieving these goals include increasing the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings; identifying areas suitable for renewable energy generation; encouraging the use and development of renewable or lower emission energy sources for electricity, heat, and transportation; and reducing transportation energy demand and single occupancy vehicle use.
- To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.
 - a. Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
 - b. Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.
- To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.
 - a. Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density.
 - b. The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
 - c. The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
 - d. Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
 - e. Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.
- To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.



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- To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.
 - a. Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
 - b. New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
 - c. Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
 - d. Accessory apartments within or attached to single-family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives, elders, or persons who have a disability should be allowed.
- To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.
 - a. Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply, and sewage and solid waste disposal.
 - b. The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.
- To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.
- To encourage flood resilient communities.
 - a. New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.
 - b. The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.
 - c. Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged.
- To equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens as described in 3 V.S.A. chapter 72.



Danville; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Appendix 2: The Municipal Plan in Permitting

This appendix provides information about how municipal plans are used in local and state permitting processes. Municipal plans are primarily used in the review of development under municipally adopted bylaws; District Environmental Commission review of proposed subdivisions and development under Act 250; and Public Service Board review of public utility generation and transmission facilities under Section 248, and (through 2017) interconnected telecommunications facilities.



A2.1. Planning Ahead of Permitting

The municipal plan provides the larger context for permitting reviews of proposed development. It identifies what, when, where, and how development should occur in relation to available land, infrastructure, resources, and community objectives that have been established through extensive community outreach and discussion. While the permitting process can be used to identify and mitigate the impacts of a particular proposal, in the absence of clear policy guidance it cannot, on a case by case basis, address larger community concerns regarding the type, location, and cumulative impacts of development. A plan that is well-considered and vetted in advance of the permitting process will better inform and guide what happens on the ground.

A2.1.1. Adopting and Amending Bylaws

Vermont law requires a municipality to have a current plan in order to adopt and update local zoning, subdivision and other bylaws. These regulations must conform to and have the purpose of implementing the plan. The municipal plan's land use element and proposed land use map provide the template for local zoning regulations, including the zoning map. In fact, the land use map included in the plan can be designated as the zoning map, unless the planning commission determines that districts shown on the land use map are not described accurately or in sufficient detail ([24 V.S.A. § 4411](#)).

When a bylaw or zoning map is amended, the planning commission is required to consider whether the proposed change “conforms with or furthers the goals and policies contained in the municipal plan”— including how it is compatible with future land uses and densities of development described in the plan. For this purpose, “conformance with the plan” means that a proposed amendment:

- Makes progress toward attaining, or at least does not interfere with, the goals and policies contained in the municipal plan
- Provides for proposed future land uses, densities, and intensities of development contained in the municipal plan
- Carries out, as applicable, any specific proposals for community facilities, or other proposed actions contained in the municipal plan.

Towns can, and should, control their own futures through comprehensive planning, zoning and subdivision regulations. Reliance on the Act 250 review process alone to address development places decisions on a town's future beyond its control.

A2.1.2. Reviewing Development

A municipality may adopt bylaws that explicitly require that proposed subdivisions and development conform to the municipal plan. Although this is permissible, it's generally



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not considered to be a “best practice,” because more specific bylaws are easier to administer and provide property owners with clarity regarding what they will or won’t be allowed to do with their property.

When drafting bylaws, it’s good practice to translate plan policies and recommendations into bylaw standards that are consistent with the plan, but will more specifically apply to proposed development projects in particular locations. In this context, it’s important to incorporate clear and consistent policy statements in the plan that can apply to the review of proposed development, along with mapped information that provides the spatial context for review—and to make sure that these are noted in the regulations.

Two examples of how to do this:

- Standards tables for each zoning district can be introduced with a purpose statement that identifies the specific planning goals for that district from the municipal plan.
- The zoning bylaws may refer to natural or scenic resource maps found in the municipal plan that identify specific natural resources for protection, such as wetlands and forest blocks.

The municipal plan may be referenced in connection with conditional use decisions. In particular, the “character of the area affected” by a proposed project, as considered under conditional use review, is defined by the purpose of the zoning district in which it is located, and specifically stated policies and standards of the municipal plan that apply to that district or location ([24 V.S.A. § 4414\(3\)](#)).



A2.2. Act 250 Review

Municipal legislative bodies and municipal planning commissions have automatic standing to participate in Act 250 proceedings for all [10 criteria](#). Participation in Act 250 is an important tool for municipal plan implementation, particularly in communities without zoning or subdivision regulations. The hearings conducted by District Environmental Commissions are relatively informal, and generally accessible to applicants and other parties. If a municipality cannot actively participate in hearings, a well-developed municipal plan is especially valuable.

With or without active participation by the municipality, the District Environmental Commission must evaluate whether the proposed development conforms to the municipal plan, in order to conclude that the proposed development satisfies criterion 10. A plan that provides clear guidance – that can stand on its own, as interpreted by the District Environmental Commission – may also help resolve local differences over proposed development, preferably in advance of the hearing process.

Municipalities also have the option to adopt “local Act 250 review” under [24 V.S.A. § 4420](#). Any municipality that has a plan and bylaws may adopt the Act 250 criteria in their bylaws and authorize their development review board (DRB) to review the municipal impacts of a proposed development. The municipal impacts relate to educational facilities and municipal services. The DRB may also evaluate whether a proposed project conforms to the municipal plan. The DRB does not have party status in Act 250. But its determinations create the presumption that a project is (or is not) detrimental to public health and welfare, and does (or does not) conform to the municipal plan.

Regional planning commissions (RPCs) are required to aid the District Environmental Commission in their review of projects under each of the 10 criteria, including conformance with the regional plan. The extent of RPC participation in Act 250 hearings varies by region in relation to its priorities, the regional plan, the nature of a project, and available staff and resources.

Regional planning commissions are also required, in their regional plans, to define “substantial regional impact” as it applies to proposed development within the region. This definition should help resolve potential conflicts between regional and municipal plans in state regulatory proceedings. The policies or provisions of a regional plan are considered to the extent that they do not conflict with the municipal plan; or when it is demonstrated that the project in question will have a substantial regional impact, as defined in the regional plan ([24 V.S.A. § 4348](#)). It’s therefore good practice, when developing plan policies for consideration in Act 250 and other state regulatory proceedings, to identify where municipal and regional plans may conflict— especially with regard to the type and location of development that may have substantial regional impact.



A2.3. Section 248 Public Utilities and the Public Utilities Commission

Public utilities in Vermont are regulated by the state's three-member Public Utilities Commission (PUC), appointed by the Governor. PUC jurisdiction extends to the regulation of power generation and transmission facilities, under a process generally referred to as "Section 248" review (as authorized under [30 V.S.A. § 248](#))¹. The extent of a review under Section 248 varies based on the type and scale of a project; but all facilities regulated by the PUC – including all solar, wind, and other renewable energy facilities connected to the power grid – are exempt from municipal regulation under Chapter 117 ([24 V.S.A. § 4413\(b\)](#)).

The Section 248 process is also a more formal, legal process than Act 250. Applications for larger projects are presented as "petitions" to the PUC, and projects smaller than 500 kW go through either a registration or an application process and benefit from certain criteria being conditionally waived and a more streamlined review process.

Section 248 hearings are conducted "on the record," similar to court proceedings – with similar, potentially significant, costs to participants. Parties (either parties or intervenors) are typically represented by legal counsel. Technical (evidentiary) hearings are conducted by hearing officers or the board; related findings and determinations rely heavily on testimony and evidence presented by expert witnesses during these hearings. The PUC issues its findings in the form of a written decision (order) that supports the issuance or denial of a Certificate of Public Good. Given the legal status of Section 248 review, PUC decisions (unlike Act 250 decisions) are appealable directly to the Vermont Supreme Court. Given the legal nature of the 248 review process, the PUC produced and periodically updates its online [Public Participation and Intervention Guide](#).

In a Section 248 proceeding the [PUC] is engaged in a legislative, policy making process in which it uses its discretion to weigh alternatives presented, using particular expertise and informed judgment.

In re *Twenty-four Electric Utilities*
159 Vt. 339, 357 (1992).

The Department of Public Service (DPS) represents the public interest in Section 248 proceedings and is a statutory party, as is the Agency of Natural Resources. The host municipality and the regional planning commission, the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, and adjacent regional planning commissions and municipal legislative bodies (if the distance of the facility's nearest component to the boundary is 500' or 10 times the height of the facility's tallest component, whichever is greater) have the right to participate by filing a motion to intervene. Other affected municipalities, other state agencies and adjoining property owners (outside of net metering cases) usually do not have statutory party status, but generally receive notice of upcoming petitions or applications, may participate in public meetings, and are invited to submit comments in advance of the technical hearing process. To intervene as formal parties under relevant



criteria, they may also petition the board as required to participate and present testimony and evidence in technical hearings.

¹ The PUC also has jurisdiction over “networked” telecommunications facilities under 30 V.S.A. §248a, in support of current policies and programs to establish statewide broadband coverage.

A2.3.1. State vs. Local Control Over Energy Facility Siting and Development

There’s often confusion regarding the ability of Vermont communities to plan for and regulate power generation and transmission facilities. This is due in part to the fact that, prior to the legislative enactment of Section 248 in 1969, jurisdiction over energy development was shared between the state and its municipalities. Chapter 117, enacted in 1968, gave municipalities limited authority to regulate generation and transmission facilities (under former § 4409(a)). This language remained in statute until 2003. Bylaws

An oft-cited 1975 Vermont Supreme Court opinion, *City of South Burlington v. Vermont Electric Power Company* (133 Vt. 438), issued on appeal in response to the city’s attempt to require a zoning permit for a proposed transmission line, clearly established that:

- [Public Utility Commission] orders preempt municipal orders. The municipal ability to regulate energy facilities – then with regard to size, height, bulk, setbacks, etc. – applies only where there is no relevant public service order for such facilities (e.g., to off- grid facilities).
- Where a clash of authority exists between state and municipal control of a public utility furnishing a statewide service, the municipality plays a secondary role.
- The Chapter 117 provision that the more stringent state or local regulation should apply, applies only to state statutes directly regulating land development –and generation and transmission facilities under Section 248 are not, by definition (under §6001(3) of Act 250) such development.
- The requirement under Section 248 for notice to municipalities, and that “due consideration” be given to their recommendations, implies that within the Section 248 process, municipal enactments, including municipal plan recommendations, are advisory rather than controlling.

Chapter 117 was finally amended in 2003 in response to this ruling, to more clearly prohibit municipal regulation of public utility power generation plant and transmission facilities regulated under 30 V.S.A. § 248. (Given that the PUC issues certificates of public good for even the smallest (<15kW) net-metered solar and wind installations connected to the utility grid, this precludes municipal regulation of installations through local zoning. Vermont municipalities are authorized (but not required) to adopt screening bylaws or ordinances for ground-mounted solar installations, only for consideration and application by the PUC to a particular project – they are not separately enforceable by the municipality.



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dating from this era often include provisions regulating energy facilities. As amended in 1979, Chapter 117 also requires that comprehensive plans include energy elements that address energy conservation and renewable energy development. More recently, questions of jurisdiction have been raised in response to Vermont's changing energy landscape, with regard to the extent, scale and siting of wind and solar energy development. Municipalities and RPCs may now adopt and obtain approval for enhanced energy plans to enable greater local input over electricity generating facilities. Prior to 2017, municipal and regional plans were only given "due consideration" in the Section 248 process, which was not defined in statute. Statute now allows municipalities and regional planning commissions to adopt plans that receive "substantial deference," which means that the plan to be considered is assumed to be "correct, valid, and reasonable."

Given that municipalities cannot directly regulate generation and transmission facilities, having clear municipal plan policies for consideration by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) under Section 248 proceedings, and local participation in the Section 248 process, are the primary means to implement local plan goals and objectives for energy facility siting and development. Municipalities and regional planning commissions have the option of adopting enhanced energy plans (as a component of their plans) and obtaining an affirmative determination of energy compliance that will allow the Public Service Board to give "substantial deference" to the local or regional plan in decisions on electric generation facilities. Details on preparing enhanced energy plans are available from the Department of Public Service and from your regional planning commission.

Standards, recommendations and guidance on preparing an enhanced energy plan:
<http://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/act-174-recommendations-and-determination-standards>



A2.4. Summary of Guidance on Use of the Municipal Plan in Permitting

Municipal plans play a critical role in local development review by setting the goals of development bylaws, and in Act 250 and Section 248 proceedings, by providing the framework – and basis in adopted public policy – for determining how land and resources important to the community should be developed or conserved. Municipal and regional participation in Act 250 and Section 248 proceedings is also recognized as an essential form of plan implementation – particular for development that is otherwise exempted from local review.

While aspirational in its vision and goals for the future, a municipal plan may also incorporate policies – including clearly stated directives – for achieving these goals. To be considered in a regulatory setting, plan policies, or written community standards, must:

- Be clear, consistent and unambiguous – for example, policies to protect all ridgelines from development, which may conflict with policies to promote renewable energy development, will not be considered.
- Use language appropriate for use in this context – that direct or mandates, rather than recommends or encourages (e.g., “shall” versus “should” or “may”).
- Apply to specific resources and locations – for example, as indicated on proposed land use, or scenic resource maps that show where resources identified for protection (e.g., a particular ridgeline or viewshed) are located.

Generally, with few exceptions, policies and maps, considered in regulatory reviews must be included in, appended to, or incorporated by reference in the adopted plan in effect at the time of application—to guide both applicants in siting and developing proposed projects, and boards that then review them. Regional planning commissions are the best source for information and technical assistance in developing policies and maps that will withstand regulatory scrutiny. Several have also produced guides to help communities navigate and more effectively participate in Act 250 and 248 proceedings.



A2.5. Contributors

This Module was initially created in 2017 through generous contributions from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Representatives from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development and Sharon Murray, Front Porch Community Planning Inc., with support from numerous community volunteers, collaborated on the research and creation of the original.

The 2025 update to this guide was led by the Northeastern Vermont Development Association in association with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and consulting team from DuBois & King.

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Charlotte; Image Credit: DuBois & King

Appendix 3: Checklists

The following summaries provide step-by-step guidance for municipalities in what's required by state law to update or adopt a new municipal plan. It's adopted from a checklist first developed by the Vermont Land Use Education and Training Collaborative.

Additional planning resources formerly hosted at the Vermont Planning Information Center are now available through the Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies (VAPDA) at their [website](#).



A3.1. Checklist: Municipal Plan Adoption and Amendment

PLANNING COMMISSION HEARING(S), SUBMITTALS

A) Transmittal of Proposed Plan/Amendment/Repeal:

- **Deadline for action:** 30 days prior to first hearing date (a.k.a. 30 day notice)
- Mail by ***certified mail, return receipt***, or delivered with proof of receipt copies of each of the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ proposed plan/amendment/repeal; | ☐ hearing notice; |
| ☐ report; and | ☐ solicitation for comments |

To:

- ☐ Planning Commission chairs of adjoining municipalities (or municipal clerk if no planning commission exists)
- ☐ Executive Director, (*Name and address of Regional Planning Commission*)
- ☐ DHCD, *electronic submissions only*. See instructions: <http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/town-future/plans-bylaws>
- ☐ Interested groups who requested notice in writing. (List groups)

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4384(e)

Mailing Date: _____ **Initialed:** _____

On file: copy of proposed plan/amendment/repeal, hearing notice and report as mailed

B) Required Public Hearing Notice:

- **Deadline for action:** 15 days prior to first hearing date

The planning commission shall hold at least one public hearing on the proposed plan/amendment/repeal, following 15 days notice. All hearings must be warned in accordance with the notice requirements under §§4384 (d) and 4444. *Note: In calculating the warning/notice period, the first day shall not be counted, and the final day shall be counted.*

The planning commission has two options to notify residents under §4444. Most communities use this one:

Publication in a newspaper of general circulation and posting a notice in three places in the municipality one of which must be in or near the clerk's office including date, time, place and purpose of the hearing, with either the full text of the material, **or** a summary, including a statement of purpose, geographic areas affected, table of contents/listing of section headings, and a description of the place within the municipality where the full text and/or maps may be examined.

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4444



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Posting Dates: _____ *Version Warned:* _____

Where posted (*2 locations minimum*): _____

Municipal Clerk's Office: _____

Newspaper: _____ **Publication Date** _____

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

1) The full text or a summary including: ☐ a statement of purpose; ☐ geographic areas affected; ☐ table of contents/listing of section headings; and ☐ a description where the full text may be examined.

Initialed: _____

On file: copies of posted and published notices, dated copy of proposed plan/amendment/repeal as warned, copies of voter checklist and grand list, if applicable

C) Planning Commission Hearing:

➤ ***Deadline for action:*** 15 days after notice publication

As noted, the planning commission must hold at least one public hearing, following public notice, on the proposed plan/amendment/repeal as warned. *Note: No changes may be made between the time the public notice is posted/published and the public hearing.*

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4384 (d), 4444

Hearing Date/Time: _____

Location: _____

On file: board minutes; comments submitted

D) Submittal of proposed plan/amendment/repeal to the legislative body and clerk:

The planning commission may make changes to the proposed plan/amendment and to any written report and thereafter submit them to the legislative body. Simultaneous with its submissions, the planning commission shall file with the clerk of the municipality a copy of the proposed plan/amendment/repeal and written reports as submitted to the legislative body, for public review.

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4384 (f)

Filing Date: _____ **Initialed:** _____

On file: dated copy of proposed plan/amendment/repeal with revisions, reports as submitted by the planning commission to the legislative body and clerk following final planning commission hearing



A3.2 Checklist: Municipal Plan Amendment / Adoption (Selectboard/City Council)

LEGISLATIVE HEARING(S)

A) Changes to proposed plan/amendment/repeal:

➤ **Deadline for action:** *15 days prior to final hearing date*

The legislative body may change the proposed plan/amendment/repeal, but shall not do so less than 15 days prior to the final public hearing. If substantial changes are made in the concept, meaning, or extent of the proposed plan/amendment/repeal, it shall warn a new public hearing(s). If any part of the proposal is changed, the change shall be filed at least 15 days prior to the public hearing with the municipal clerk, anyone requesting a copy in writing, and with the planning commission. The planning commission must submit a report thereon to the legislative body prior to or at the public hearing that analyzes the extent to which the changed proposal is consistent with § 4302.

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4385 (b)

Filing Date: _____ **Initialed:** _____

On file: copy of proposed changes as warned, and filed with clerk and planning commission. Planning commission report if submitted prior to hearing

B) Required Public Hearing Notice:

➤ **Deadline for action:** *15 days prior to the first hearing date*

Not less than 30 days nor more than 120 days after a proposed plan or amendment is submitted to the legislative body of a municipality under §4384 of this title, the legislative body of a municipality with a population of 2,500 persons or less, shall hold the first of one or more public hearings, after public notice. A municipality with a population of more than 2,500 persons shall hold two or more such hearings. The legislative body must make copies of proposal and written report by the planning commission available to the public upon request. *Note: In calculating the warning/notice period, the first day shall not be counted, and the final day shall be counted.*

The legislative body has two options under §4444. Most communities use this one:

Publication in a newspaper of general circulation and posting a notice in three places in the municipality one of which must be in or near the clerk's office including date, time, place and purpose of the hearing, with either the full text of the material, **or** a summary, including a statement of purpose, geographic areas affected, table of contents/listing of section headings, and a description of the place within the municipality where the full text and/or maps may be examined; *or*

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4385, 4444



The Municipal Plan

Posting Dates: _____ *Version Warned:* _____

Municipality (2 *locations minimum*): _____

Municipal Clerk's Office: _____

Newspaper: _____ **Publication Date:** _____

AND, either:

1) post the full text or a summary: ☐ a statement of purpose; ☐ geographic areas affected; ☐ table of contents/listing of section headings; and ☐ a description where the full text may be examined;

OR 2) mail/deliver to each voter on the voter checklist and each landowner on the grand list:

☐ the hearing notice; ☐ a copy of the full text; **or** ☐ summary

Initialed: _____

On file: copies of posted and published notices, dates copy of proposed plan/amendment/repeal with planning commission report, as warned, copies of vote checklist and grand list, if applicable

C) Legislative Body Hearing(s):

- ***Deadline for action:*** *not less than 30 nor more than 120 days following submission by the planning commission (for the first hearing) as warned*

Not less than 30 days nor more than 120 days after a proposed plan or amendment is submitted to the legislative body of a municipality, the legislative body of a municipality with a population of 2,500 persons or less, shall hold the first of one or more public hearings, after public notice. A municipality with a population of more than 2,500 persons shall hold two or more such hearings. Also as noted above, if the legislative body makes any substantial changes, it shall warn a new public hearing or hearings and file the proposed changes with the clerk, anyone requesting a copy in writing, and planning commission at least 15 days prior to the final public hearing as warned. *Note failure to hold a hearing within the 120-day period does not invalidate the adoption of the plan and amendment.*

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4385(a)

Hearing Date/Time: _____ **Location:** _____

Initialed: _____

On file: record of proceedings, attendance, planning commission report as submitted

ADOPTION OF MUNICIPAL PLAN/AMENDMENT/REPEAL

A) via legislative body action:

- ***Deadline for action:*** *within one year of date of final planning commission hearing*



The Municipal Plan

Plans, amendments, and/or repeals, shall be adopted or rejected by a majority of the members of the legislative body at a meeting which is held after final public hearing, and shall be effective immediately.

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4385 (c)

Date of Meeting/Vote: _____

Action: Adopted ☐ Rejected ☐ **Initialed:** _____

On file: meeting minutes, record of vote, dated copy of proposed plan/amendment/repeal as accepted or rejected by legislative body

B.) via Australian Ballot:

➤ **Deadline for action:** *within one year of date of final planning commission hearing*

A proposed plan, amendment or repeal for a municipality which has elected (in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4385 (c)) to do so, shall be adopted or rejected by the vote of the municipality by Australian Ballot (17 VSA, §2641) at a regular or special meeting duly warned and held after final public hearing. The adoption or rejection shall be effective immediately. *Note: A public informational hearing is not required for bylaws adopted via Australian ballot; however, the town may do so.*

Vote by Australian Ballot. Questions voted on by Australian Ballot must be warned according to 17 VSA, §2641. The warning must be posted in **two** locations, in or near the municipal clerk's office. The warning must also be distributed using one of the following methods:

- published in a newspaper designated by the legislative body; or
- published and distributed as a warned article in the municipal report; or
- otherwise distributed in written form to all town or city postal patrons at least 10 days before the meeting.

Statutory reference(s): 17 V.S.A. §2641 and §2642

➤ **Deadlines for action:**

- Posting: not less than 30 nor more than 40 days prior to vote; and
- Publication, newspaper: at least 5 days prior to vote; or
- Publication, report: distributed at least 10 days prior to meeting
- Vote: within one year of date of final planning commission hearing.

Posting Dates:

Municipality (2 locations minimum): _____

Municipal Clerk's Office _____

Newspaper: _____ **Publication Date:** _____

Meeting/Vote Date: _____

Action: Adopted ☐ Rejected ☐ **Initialed:** _____



The Municipal Plan

On file: copy of notice as posted, published, meeting minutes, record of vote; dated copy of proposed plan/amendment/repeal as accepted or rejected by voters

C) Required conveyance of adopted Plans and Amendments:

➤ **Deadline for action:** 30 days following adoption

Plans and amendments shall be effective upon adoption. Copies of the adopted plan shall be provided to the regional planning commission and to the commissioner of Housing & Community Development.

Send a copy of:

☐ adopted plan or repeal (may be digital or hard copy)

To: ☐ Executive Director, (*Name and address of Regional Planning Commission*)

☐ DHCD, *electronic submissions only. See instructions:*

<http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/town-future/plans-bylaws>

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA 4385 (c)

Mailing Date: _____ **Initialed:** _____

On file: copy and original of adopted plan; this form and all supporting documentation

The following form shall be completed and recorded by the Municipal Clerk following plan adoption/amendment/repeal:

CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL PLAN

___ADOPTION ___AMENDMENT ___REPEAL

I, _____, Clerk of the Town/Village/City of _____, in _____ County, State of Vermont, do hereby certify pursuant to 24 VSA, §§ 4384, 4385, 4444, and 4447 that the following actions were taken by the designated parties with the respect to the adoption/amendment/repeal of the proposed municipal plan for the Town of _____, of which the attached is a true copy.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Attach herewith all documentation, tear sheets, notices, etc. resulting from and confirming this adoption.



A3.3. Regional Approval of Municipal Plan

REGIONAL APPROVAL AND CONFIRMATION

Initialed: _____

If a municipality wishes its plan or plan amendment to be eligible for approval under the provisions of 24 VSA §4350 of this title, it shall request approval by the regional planning commission. The request for approval may be before or after adoption of the plan by the municipality, at the option of the municipality.

Any such requests should be in writing, and accompanied by a copy of the adopted or draft plan. The RPC will carry out and conduct all related and necessary reviews, hearings and processes. *This process requires up to 60 days from notification to complete; to meet a shorter timeline or specific deadlines, the RPC will require contact and coordination prior to the planning commission hearing notice.*

Statutory reference(s): 24 VSA §4385(c)

Submitted to RPC: No ☐ Yes ☐

Date of submission to RPC: _____

On file at the RPC: approval and confirmation forms, hearing minutes, staff review



A3.4. Planning Commission Reporting Form for Municipal Plan Amendments

*When considering an amendment to a plan, the planning commission shall prepare a written report on the proposal. **The report shall address the extent to which the plan, as amended, is consistent with the goals established in §4302 of this title.***

If the proposal would alter the designation of any land area, the report should cover the following points:

1. *The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.*
 2. *The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:*
 - (A) *the municipal tax base; and*
 - (B) *the need for public facilities;*
 3. *The amount of vacant land which is:*
 - (A) *already subject to the proposed new designation; and*
 - (B) *actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.*
 4. *The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:*
 - (A) *appropriate alternative locations;*
 - (B) *alternative uses for the area under consideration; and*
 - (C) *the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated*
 5. *The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability and existing development in the area."*
- ❖ At least **30** days prior to the first hearing, a copy of the proposed plan or amendment and this written report must be delivered with proof of the receipt, or mailed by certified mail, return receipt requested, to each of the following:
1. the chairperson of the planning commission of each abutting municipality, or in the absence of any planning commission in an abutting municipality, to the clerk of that municipality;
 2. the executive director of the regional planning commission of the area in which the municipality is located;
 3. the Department of Housing and Community Development within the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.